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IDYLLS OF THE KING

TENNYSON

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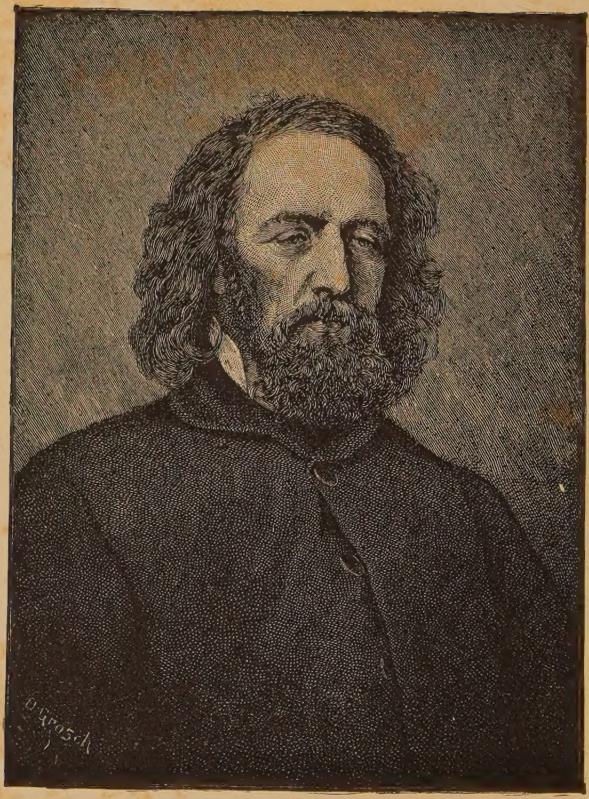

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

MAYNARD'S ENGLISH CLASSIC SERIES.

IDYLLS OF THE KING

THE COMING OF ARTHUR
GARETH AND LYNETTE
GUINEVERE
LANCELOT AND ELAINE
THE HOLY GRAIL
THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

BY

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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BIOGRAPHY

Of Alfred Tennyson it is preëminently true that the events of his life took place in his intellect. It was a peaceful, well-ordered life — that of this Lincolnshire rector's son, born August 6, 1809. His first published poetry was in a slim volume (1827) in partnership with his brother Charles. This brother, his senior by a year, was his close friend. Together they attended the Louth grammar school (1816–20), and, after being tutored by their father, together they went to Trinity College, Cambridge (1828), where Alfred gained the Chancellor's medal by his poem *Timbuctoo* (1829). At Cambridge then were many choice spirits — Thackeray, Helps, Sterling, Kinglake, Maurice, Trench, Milnes, Merivale, Spedding. Tennyson's closest friend was the gifted young Arthur Henry Hallam, with whom he made a tour of the Pyrenees in their summer vacation (1830). Hallam's early death (1833) was the great sorrow of Tennyson's young manhood and the inspiration of "Break, Break, Break," and *In Memoriam*. Among his other early friends were Hunt, Hare, Fitzgerald, Carlyle, Gladstone, Rogers, Landor, Forster. These recognized his genius, but the public and critics generally were slow in doing so, and volume after volume of his poems met indifference, censure, ridicule. At last (1842) a volume containing among other noble poems *Locksley Hall*, *Ulysses*, *The Two Voices*, and the revised *Palace of Art* convinced the English people that a new poet had arisen in its midst. Tennyson's ensuing years were, for the most part, a progress from one literary triumph to another. The year 1850 was his *Annus Mirabilis*. In it he published *In Memoriam*, he was made

Poet Laureate in place of the deceased Laureate, Wordsworth, and he married Miss Emily Sellwood. The chief events in his later tranquil life were the publication of various poems; leaving his Twickenham home for Farringford, Isle of Wight, and later migrations to Aldworth in Sussex; the birth of his sons Hallam (1852) and Lionel (1854); and occasional journeys about Great Britain or on the Continent. In 1884 he was elevated to the peerage. In 1886 his younger son, Lionel, died on his way home from India, and October 6, 1892, the Poet Laureate, full of years and honors, died and was laid to rest in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Carlyle gives a vivid word-picture of the poet at middle age: "One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusky-dark hair; bright, laughing hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian-looking; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy; smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between; speech and speculation free and plenteous; I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe."

The Princess (1847), a midsummer day's dream, has yet a strong moral purpose, being Tennyson's contribution to the discussion concerning woman's proper sphere.

In Memoriam (1850) is perhaps the greatest of the four great English elegies. It voices the religious feeling and thought of the age. Doubts — born of woe, sorrow, heart-break — are overcome by triumphant faith in the God who is immortal Life and hence immortal Love.

Maud (1857), Tennyson's favorite among his poems, is generally considered the poorest. It is a lyrical monodrama of love and madness.

The Idylls of the King (1859–85) is an epic of a series of Idylls founded on the old British legends of King Arthur and the Knights of his Round Table, which

Tennyson imbued with deep moral significance. "If this be not the greatest narrative poem since *Paradise Lost*, what other English production are you to name in its place?"— *Stedman.*

Tennyson's genius is lyric and idyllic rather than dramatic. Some of his character-pieces are dramatically powerful, but his dramas are doubtful successes or unequivocal failures. The best are *Harold* (1876), *Becket* (1879), and *Queen Mary* (1875), which constitute an historical trilogy on the making of England. His other dramas are *The Falcon* (1879), for the plot of which Tennyson was indebted to Boccaccio; *The Cup* (1881), founded on Plutarch's *De Claris Mulieribus: The Promise of May* (1882), and *The Foresters* (1892), an "idyllic masque" of Robin Hood days.

Poetry was to Tennyson not the pastime of an idle day, but the serious work of a lifetime. He pruned and perfected his verse until carping critics came to say it was too smooth and polished, over sweet and beautiful. To the charge that he lacked animation and strength, the ringing ballad *The Revenge* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and the powerful blank verse of *Ulysses* are all-sufficient answer. Among the many perplexed and obscure voices of the age it behooves us to be thankful for one true man and true poet who united deep thought, calm wisdom, and serene faith with clarity of expression.

The only authoritative biography is *Tennyson's Memoir* by his son; in the Harper edition of 1884 there is a pleasant biographical sketch by Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie. There are many good critical works on Tennyson — those of Brooke, Van Dyke, Dixon, Stedman, and others, and special studies by Gatty, Genung, Dawson, Robertson, Rolfe, and many more, which are all helpful in their degree. But the essential thing is the careful study of the works by which this master soul reveals himself to us.

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THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

THE *Idylls of the King* is a group of poems, twelve in number, dealing with the character and reign of King Arthur, and describing the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table. The name *Idylls*, meaning "little pictures," was applied by the poet to these poems, each of which has a certain completeness in itself.

"The vision of Arthur as I have drawn him," said Tennyson, "had come upon me when, little more than a boy, I first lighted upon Malory." This was the vision which had inspired Spenser to write his *Faerie Queene* and which made the youthful Milton ponder an Arthurian epic, taken from "the lofty tales and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood." But the *Faerie Queene* was for Spenser, the epic of heaven and hell for Milton, and it was for our latter-day bard to enshrine in poetry the story of the blameless king.

Tennyson carried in his heart for a quarter of a century his plan of a great poem on this "greatest of all poetical subjects" before he definitely decided in what shape to embody it; and, having begun, another quarter of a century elapsed before he completed his work.

The little volume of his poems published in 1832 contained the dreamy lyric *The Lady of Shalott*, which foreshadowed the *Elaine* of the *Idylls*. In these two poems we have the same subject treated in Tennyson's earlier and later manner; the graceful fancy of the one is, in its way, as exquisite as the breadth of treatment, the richness of coloring, and the dramatic power of the other. A note-book of this period contains a rough draft of a musical masque which he meditated

on the same subject. The 1842 volume contained two other Arthurian lyrics, *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*, and also an epical fragment, the *Morte d'Arthur*, afterward incorporated into *The Passing of Arthur*, which marked the beginning of a new method of treatment. In 1859 Tennyson gave to the public four *Idylls of the King*, picturing four phases of woman character, — Enid, fair maid and loyal wife, Vivien the false, Elaine, "the lily maid of Astolat," and Queen Guinevere, erring but repentant. *Enid* was afterward divided into two parts, *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*. The favor with which these *Idylls* was received decided Tennyson to carry out the epical plan mentioned in the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Prince Albert greatly admired the *Idylls* and sent his copy to Tennyson, asking the poet to inscribe his name therein. The prince said, "You would thus add a peculiar interest to the book containing those beautiful songs, from the perusal of which I derived the greatest enjoyment. They quite rekindle the feeling with which the legends of King Arthur must have inspired the chivalry of old, whilst the graceful form in which they are presented blends those feelings with the softer tone of our present age." The edition of the *Idylls* which appeared in 1862 was dedicated to the memory of the prince who had died a few months before.

In 1869 were published four new *Idylls*, — *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur*. *The Last Tournament* and *Gareth and Lynette* appeared in 1872, and in 1885 appeared *Balin and Balan* designed as an introduction to *Merlin and Vivien*. In 1888 the poems, now twelve in number, were rearranged in their final order with *The Coming of Arthur* as introduction, the ten poems describing the deeds of Arthur's knights grouped under the general head of *The Round Table*, and *The Passing of Arthur* as conclusion. Thus arranged their order was as follows: *The Coming of Arthur*, *Gareth and Lynette*, *The Marriage of*

Geraint, Geraint and Enid, Balin and Balan, Merlin and Vivien, Lancelot and Elaine, The Holy Grail, Pelleas and Ettarre, The Last Tournament, Guinevere, and *The Passing of Arthur*. Now could be seen for the first time the epic wholeness of the poems which groups knights and ladies about the central figure of Arthur as stars about a central sun. The epic begins with the coming of the king and depicts the glory of the early days of the Round Table when, as in *Gareth and Lynette*, right-minded youth found "the joy of life in steepness overcome and victories of ascent; then we see the glory darkened by the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere, the crime of Pelleas and Ettarre, the corruption of Vivien, until, resistless and terrible, comes the final act of the tragedy, the "last, dim, weird battle" in which the king passed away and the old order was overthrown.

The poet himself calls attention to another phase of unity in the *Idylls*, which follow the round of the seasons as well as the course of human fortunes. "The Coming of Arthur is on the night of the New Year; when he is wedded 'the world is white with May'; on a summer night the vision of the Holy Grail appears; and the 'Last Tournament' is in 'the yellowing autumntide.' Guinevere flies through the mists of autumn, and Arthur's death takes place at midnight at midwinter. The form of 'The Coming of Arthur' and of the 'Passing' is purposely more archaic than that of the other 'Idylls.'"

Of *Gareth and Lynette*, the second poem in the completed group of the *Idylls*, Dr. Van Dyke says: "She [Lynette] judges by the senses. She cannot imagine that a man who comes from among the lower classes can possibly be a knight, and despises Gareth's proffered services. But his pride, being true, is stronger than hers, being false. He will not be rebuffed; follows her, fights her battles, wins first her admiration, then her love, and brings her at last to see that true knighthood lies not in the name but in the deed.

"The atmosphere of this *Idyll* is altogether pure and

clear. There is as yet no shadow of the storm that is coming to disturb Arthur's realm. The chivalry of the spirit overcomes the chivalry of the sense in a natural, straightforward, joyous way, and all goes well with the world."

There is little or no evidence of the historical existence of King Arthur. Many recent critics regard him as the mythological or semi-mythological hero of a solar myth. It is probable, however, that the legends enshrined the memory of a real chief of the Britons, a race partly civilized and Christianized by the Romans and then overrun by the heathen Saxons who in the sixth century drove them from their fair English fields into the mountains of Wales, the moors of Cornwall, and the forests of Brittany. King Arthur, the hero who stemmed for a time the tide of Saxon invasion, was honored in Keltic song and legend. The earliest allusion to him is in the Welsh bards of the seventh century, and from the Welsh and Breton minstrels Geoffrey of Monmouth drew material in 1140 for his Latin chronicle which he called a *History of the Kings of England*. Whether Arthur was a real king or only a solar myth, he came to be in English, French, and German legends of the Middle Ages the ideal of royal wisdom and knightly virtue and prowess. The legends about him and his knights were told and retold by Wace, Layamon, and others; but they are best known to us of the English-speaking world through *Morte Darthur*, the fine prose version of Sir Thomas Malory. Of Malory we know only what he himself tells us, that he was a knight and that he finished his work in the ninth year of Edward IV. (1469–70). The book was printed by Caxton in the summer of 1485. Caxton, after a naïve defense of the historical reality of King Arthur, says: "Herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renommee

And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, be ye at your liberty."

It is not the primitive sixth century which Malory depicts. The old legends are set in the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, with their noble knights and fair maids and stately dames, their tournaments, and hunting parties. Nor is historical reality attained or sought by Tennyson. He made his poem "the epic of chivalry, but of a chivalry interpreted by nineteenth-century ideals." Not to the sixth, nor yet to the twelfth century, belongs the ideal of kingship as of supreme responsibility and service. It was the poet's aim, unhampered by striving after historical verisimilitude, to depict human life in its noblest phase, "ideal manhood closed in real man."

Malory had accepted and chronicled conflicting legends about Arthur, — those ascribing to him enormities of wickedness and cruelty, and those depicting him in the character described by the old chronicle, "God has not made since Adam was, the man more perfect than Arthur." Tennyson freed the story of inconsistency and from among the tangled threads chose and followed the one which led to Arthur as the ideal man, the blameless king.

In *Morte Darthur* the king's downfall is represented as the consequence of a great crime which he had committed; Tennyson attributes it to the treachery and crime of others, the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere, the corruption of Vivien, the perversion of Arthur's ideals by his own followers. The poem is permeated with deep spiritual significance, "shadowing Sense at war with Soul."

We are often told, with the poet cited as authority, that the *Idylls of the King* is an allegory in which Arthur represents the soul, Guinevere, love; Vivien, passion; the Lady of the Lake, religion, etc. The poet in his later years was often impatient of those who, as he

thought, pressed the allegory too far. He wished his readers to understand that while there are many allegorical passages, such as the description of the Lady of the Lake, there was a parabolic rather than an allegoric drift in the poem; that is, as Dr. Van Dyke points out, abstract qualities do not represent persons, but the poem describes the trials, conflicts, and loves of real men and women in whom these qualities were living and working.

The poet himself says: "How much of history we have in the story of Arthur is doubtful. Let not my readers press too hardly on details, whether for history or for allegory. Some think that King Arthur may be taken to typify conscience. He is, anyhow, meant to be a man who spent himself in the cause of honor, duty, and self-sacrifice, who felt and aspired with his nobler knights, though with a stronger and clearer conscience than any of them, 'reverencing his conscience as his king.'"

The general metrical type of the *Idylls* is the iambic, varied to suit the theme by the skillful use of trochees, anapests, and occasional dactyls. Tennyson's mastery of language, tone-color, and harmony is nowhere greater than in this poem. The imagery is largely from nature, and that from the sea is particularly strong, showing an intimate knowledge of its varied moods.

CRITICAL OPINIONS

"It seems to me that the only just estimate of Tennyson's position is that which declares him to be, by eminence, the representative poet of the recent era. Not, like one or another of his compeers, representative of the melody, wisdom, passion, or other partial phase of the era, but of the time itself, with its diverse elements in harmonious conjunction. . . .

"In his verse he is as truly 'the glass of fashion and the mold of form' of the Victorian generation in the nineteenth century as Spenser was of the Elizabethan court, Milton of the Protectorate, Pope of the reign of Queen Anne. During his supremacy there have been few great leaders at the head of different schools, such as belonged to the time of Byron, Wordsworth, and Keats. His poetry has gathered all the elements which find vital expression in the complex modern art." — *Stedman's Victorian Poets.*

"To describe his command of language by any ordinary terms expressive of fluency or force would be to convey an idea both inadequate and erroneous. It is not only that he knows every word in the language suited to express his every idea; he can select with the ease of magic the word that above all others is best for his purpose; nor is it that he can at once summon to his aid the best word the language affords; with an art which Shakspere never scrupled to apply, though in our day it is apt to be counted mere Germanism, and pronounced contrary to the genius of the language, he combines old words into new epithets, he daringly mingles all colors to bring out tints that never were on sea or shore. His words gleam like pearls and opals, like rubies

and emeralds. He yokes the stern vocables of the English tongue to the chariot of his imagination, and they become gracefully brilliant as the leopards of Bacchus, soft and glowing as the Cytherean doves. He must have been born with an ear for verbal sounds, an instinctive appreciation of the beautiful and delicate in words, hardly ever equaled. Though his later works speak less of the blossom-time — show less of the efflorescence and iridescence, and mere glance and gleam of colored words — they display no falling off, but rather an advance, in the mightier elements of rhythmic speech." — *Peter Bayne.*

"The formal restrained poetry of Wordsworth wedded itself to the melody and color of Keats and Shakspere and the vigor of Byron, and the result was Tennyson." — *Waugh.*

"As long as the English language is spoken, the word-music of Tennyson will charm the ear; and when English has become a dead language, his wonderful concentration of thought into luminous speech, the exquisite pictures in which he has blended all the hues of reflection, feeling, and fancy will cause him to be read as we read Homer, Pindar, and Horace." — *George Eliot.*

"I ranked Tennyson in the first order, because with great mastery over his material, — words, — great plastic power of versification, and a rare gift of harmony, he had also vision or insight, and because feeling intensely the great questions of the day — not as a mere man of letters, but as a man — he is to some extent the interpreter of his age, not only in its mysticism which [I tried to show you] is the necessary reaction from the rigid formulas of science and the earthliness of an age of work, into the vagueness which belongs to infinitude, but also in his poetic and almost prophetic solution of some of its great questions." — *F. W. Robertson.*

"So truly did the Laureate represent the country in which he lived his long and noble life that in perhaps no way could a foreigner get to understand the spirit of the English people better than by making a close and

careful study of his poems, considering the thought and emotion there as largely typical of the race. He would meet with some things in *Maud*, for instance, which would lead him astray, but very little in the other poems. He would certainly be far more likely to gain a correct notion of England thus than by the perusal of a dozen ordinary superficial books of travel. Yet Tennyson is the only poet who could be read by a foreigner with this end in view. Shakspere might assist him somewhat, but Shakspere's men and women are too much 'citizens of the world' to be of aid in studying England merely. Spenser would give him few suggestions. Milton's sublime but lonely egotism would lead him astray. The more modern poets would give false conceptions. Byron through his false and un-English standards of life; Shelley through his inability to cope with his own enthusiasms and through his tendency to sublime idealizing; Browning because he was too busy telling the world what all men and women thought to pay much attention to what the English people were or did. Moreover, these three poets did not live enough of their lives in England to understand thoroughly the popular feelings among their countrymen; all were to a greater or less degree wanderers on the face of the earth, in strong contrast to Tennyson, who spent far the greater portion of his long life at home. Mr. Arthur, in his valuable and interesting work on Tennyson, claims place for him as the greatest national poet of this century. Why may we not go further and call him, not only the greatest national poet, but the most national? Why may we not truthfully call him 'the Poet of the English Race'?" — *George W. Alger.*

"The worst defect of the *Idylls* [is] that the central character comes so near to being

'Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null.'

But this defect is outweighed and cancelled by the fact that the poem, after all, does recognize and bring out in luminous splendor the great truths of human life.

"The first of these truths is that sin is the cause of disorder and misery, and until it is extirpated the perfect society cannot be securely established. The greater the genius, the beauty, the power, of those who transgress, the more fatal will be the influence of their sin upon other lives. This indeed is the lesson of the fall of Lancelot and Guinevere. It was because they stood so high, because they were so glorious in their manhood and womanhood, that their example had power to infect the court.

"But side by side with this truth, and in perfect harmony with it, Tennyson teaches that the soul of man has power to resist and conquer sin within its own domain, to triumph over sense by steadfast loyalty to the higher nature, and thus to achieve peace and final glory. When I say he teaches this, I do not mean that he sets it forth in any formal way as a doctrine. I mean that he shows it in the life of Arthur as a fact. The king chooses his ideal and follows it, and it lifts him up and sets him on his course like a star. His life is not a failure, as it has been called, but a glorious success, for it demonstrates the freedom of the will and the strength of the soul against the powers of evil and the fate of sin.

"Finally, the *Idylls* bring out the profound truth that there is a vicarious element in human life, and that no man lives to himself alone. The characters are distinct, but they are not isolated. They are parts of a vast organism, all bound together, all influencing one another. The victory of sense over soul is not a solitary triumph; it has far-reaching results. The evil lives of Modred, of Vivien, of Tristram, spread like a poison through the court. But no less fruitful, no less far-reaching, is the victory of soul over sense. Gareth and Enid and Balan and Bors and Bedivere and Galahad have power to help and to uplift others out of the lower life. Their lives are not wasted: nor does Arthur himself live in vain, though his Round Table is dissolved." — *H. Van Dyke: The Poetry of Tennyson.*

In his *Victorian Poets*, Stedman says: . . . "We come at last to Tennyson's master work, so recently brought to a completion after twenty years — during which period the separate *Idylls of the King* had appeared from time to time. Nave and transept, aisle after aisle, the Gothic minster has extended, until, with the addition of a cloister here and a chapel yonder, the structure stands complete.

"I hardly think that the poet at first expected to compose an epic. It has grown insensibly under the hands of one man who has given it the best years of his life, — but somewhat as Wolf conceived the Homeric poems to have grown, chant by chant, until the time came for the whole to be welded together in heroic form.

"It is the epic of chivalry, the Christian ideal of chivalry which we have deduced from a barbaric source, — our conception of what knighthood should be, rather than what it really was; but so skillfully wrought of high imaginings, fairy spells, fantastic legends, and mediæval splendors, that the whole work, suffused with the Tennysonian glamour of golden mist, seems like a chronicle illuminated by saintly hands, and often blazes with light like that which flashed from the holy wizard book when the covers were unclasped."

SUGGESTIVE QUESTIONS

(*Gareth and Lynette*)

Give in outline the plan of the *Idylls of the King.*

What is the place and purpose in the epic of *Gareth and Lynette?*

What incidents does Tennyson change in the story?

How does the conclusion of his poem differ from Malory's tale?

Can you think of reasons, from a literary standpoint, for these changes?

Which ending do you prefer, that of Malory or Tennyson? Why?

In what season of the year does the action of the poem occur?

Is there any particular appropriateness in this?

Why did Sir Kay dislike Gareth, and why was Sir Lancelot his friend?

The poem is said to be of the nature of a parable. According to this, what is the significance of each of Gareth's conflicts?

Write a character sketch of Gareth.

Write a character sketch of Lynette.

Make a list of archaic words and expressions used in this poem, giving modern equivalents for each.

From what languages chiefly are these archaisms drawn? Is there any special reason for that?

Select similes and metaphors drawn from Tennyson's observation of nature.

Can you make any inference from them as to his tastes and habits?

[1] These questions may be used as a model for similar questions on the other Idylls.

Select three passages which for thought and expression you consider the finest in the poem.

Commit to memory your favorite passage.

Compare the poem, as a whole, with other *Idylls* that you have read.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarmed overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either failed to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And through the puissance of his Table Round,

17. **Table Round.** The order of knighthood established by King Arthur. It took its name from a large round table at which the King and his knights sat for meals. Such a table is still preserved at Winchester as having belonged to King Arthur. Some accounts say that there were 150 seats at the table, and that it was originally constructed to imitate the shape of the world, which long after Arthur's time was supposed to be flat and circular in form; see *Guinevere:*

> "But I was first of all the kings who drew
> The knighthood errant of this realm and all
> The realms together under me, their Head.

Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallowed in the gardens of the King.
And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat

> In that fair Order of my Table Round,
> A glorious Company, the flower of men
> To serve as model for the mighty world
> And be the fair beginning of a time" —

We are further told that this table was originally constructed by Merlin, the wizard, for Uther Pendragon, who presented it to Leodogran, but that on Arthur's marriage with Leodogran's daughter, the table and 100 knights with it were sent to Arthur with Guinevere as a wedding gift that should please him more than a grant of land. One of the seats was called the *Siege* (i.e., seat) *Perilous* [see *The Last Tournament*] because it swallowed up any unchaste person who sat in it. Galahad the Pure was the only knight who could occupy it with safety. Other accounts say that the Round Table was constructed in imitation of the table used by Christ and His disciples at the Last Supper; that it contained 13 seats, and that the seat originally occupied by Christ was always empty except when occupied by the Holy Grail. Other Kings and Princes besides Arthur had Round Tables. In the reign of Edward I. Roger de Mortimer established a Round Table for the furtherance of warlike pastimes, and King Edward III. is said to have done the same. "To hold a Round Table" came to mean little more than to hold a tournament.

28. **lent . . . four feet.** Many authentic records of wolf-reared children in comparatively modern times are to be found. A good account of a half-wild boy, captured in a wolf's den, is given in Dr. Ball's *Jungle Life in India*, where the description of the boy's habits tallies with that given in the text of the habits

To human sucklings; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
Till, straightened, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
Groaned for the Roman legions here again,
And Cæsar's eagle: then his brother king,
Urien, assailed him: last a heathen horde,
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

But — for he heard of Arthur newly crowned,
Though not without an uproar made by those
Who cried, "He is not Uther's son" — the King
Sent to him, saying, "Arise, and help us thou!
For here between the man and beast we die."

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
But since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,
But rode a simple knight among his knights,

of his forerunners in Cameliard. Cf. the tale of Romulus and Remus and the ancient belief in the existence of the were-wolf, or *loup-garou*, a bogie, half-man, half-wolf, that devoured children. Giraldus Cambrensis tells us that Irishmen can "change into wolves."

32. **wolf-like men.** Cf. *Geraint and Enid*, of bandit knights:

> "Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born
> The three gay suits of armor which they wore,"

And many of these in richer arms than he,
She saw him not, or marked not, if she saw,
One among many, though his face was bare.
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitched
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled
The forest, letting in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight
And so returned.

For while he lingered there,
A doubt that ever smoldered in the hearts
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
Flashed forth and into war: for most of these,
Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,
Made head against him, crying, "Who is he
That he should rule us? who hath proven him
King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King;
This the son of Anton, not the King."

54. **though his face was bare**, i.e., his visor, the face-piece of his helmet, was raised. A hint is, perhaps, here given that Guinevere ought to have instinctively known at sight of Arthur's face that he was God's "highest creature here"; but, as she says of herself, in the Idyll that bears her name, her

> "false voluptuous pride, that took
> Too easily impressions from below,
> Would not look up"

to recognize the height of Arthur's purity.

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be joined with Guinevere;
And thinking as he rode, "Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
Up to my throne, and side by side with me?
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vext — O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me —
Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be joined
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."

Thereafter — as he speaks who tells the tale —
When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
So when the King had set his banner broad,

95. **field-of-battle bright . . . star.** With this bright picture of Arthur's great battle at the foundation of his realm contrast that in *The Passing of Arthur* of the "last dim, weird battle of the west," where the death-white mist and confusion dulled the hearts of all.

At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
And now the Barons and the kings prevailed,
And now the King, as here and there that war
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
And mightier of his hands with every blow,
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings
Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
To one who sins, and deems himself alone
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
Flying, and Arthur called to stay the brands
That hacked among the flyers, "Ho! they yield!"

103. **The long-lanced . . . run.** Cf. Malory, i. 13, "Then either battaile let their horses runne as fast as they might," and i. 15, "All these fortie knightes rode on afore, with great speres on their thyghes, and spurred theyr horses myghtely as fast as theyr horses might runne." **battle**, the main body of an army. Cf. Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, vi. 16:

> "Their barbed horsemen, in the rear,
> The stern battalia crowned."

120. **"Ho! they yield!"** Cf. Malory, i. 15: "With that came Merlyn upon a great black horse, and sayde to King Arthur, 'Ye have never done; have ye not done ynough? Of three score thousand ye have left on lyve but fifteene thousand; it is tyme for to saye ho—'." 'Ho' is the formal exclamation used by a commander in battle or the umpire in a tournament to order a cessation of hostilities; cf. Malory, x. 44: "Therewith the haut prince cried Ho; and then they went to lodging."

So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laughed upon his warrior whom he loved
And honored most. "Thou dost not doubt me King,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."
"Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field:
I know thee for my King!" Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, "Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
Saying, "If I in aught have served thee well,
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife."

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
Debating — "How should I that am a king,

124. **his warrior . . . most.** Sir Lancelot of the Lake; see below, lines 446–7.

127. **the fire of God . . . battle-field.** Cf. *Lancelot and Elaine*, where Lancelot again says of Arthur,

> "in his heathen war the fire of God
> Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
> No greater leader."

129. **Whereat the two . . . deathless love.** In the days of chivalry it was a common custom for two knights to swear to each other a defensive and offensive alliance, and they were then called *fratres jurati*, sworn brothers.

However much he holp me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son?"—lifted his voice, and called
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
He trusted all things, and of him required
His counsel: "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?"

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,
"Sir King, there be but two old men that know:
And each is twice as old as I; and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served
King Uther through his magic art; and one
Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,
Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran
Before the master, and so far, that Bleys
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote

141. **holp.** Cf. *holpen*, line 160, page 29.

150. **Merlin . . . art.** "According to Geoffrey of Monmouth (lib. vi. cc. 18, 19), Merlin had been court magician since the time of Vortigern, who had caused him to be sought as the only one capable of relieving him out of the difficulty he had encountered in raising a castle on Salisbury Plain" (Note in Wright's Malory). "The true history of Merlin seems to be that he was born between the years 470 and 480, and during the invasion of the Saxon took the name of Ambrose, which preceded his name of Merlin, from the successful leader of the Britons, Ambrosius Aurelianus, who was his first chief, and from his service he passed into that of King Arthur, the southern leader of the Britons" (Morley, *English Writers*, i.). Merlin is represented in *Merlin and Vivien* as the son of a demon, and also as "the great Enchanter of the Time," and again as

> "the most famous man of all those times,
> Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
> Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
> Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;
> The people call'd him Wizard—"

All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth."

To whom the King Leodogran replied,
"O friend, had I been holpen half as well
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
Then beast and man had had their share of me:
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere."

Then, when they came before him, the King said, —
"I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase: but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?"

And Ulfius and Brastias answered, "Ay."
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights

160. **holpen half as well . . . of me.** Meaning, of course, that the chamberlain's help had, in fact, been less than no help at all.

166. **I have seen . . . chase**, the reason being that the young cuckoo, having been hatched in the nest of the lesser fowl, tries to oust the offspring of the rightful owner; cuckoo's eggs are often found in the nests of smaller birds. The King asks if the lords have any reason for thinking Arthur has been put in possession of a throne to which he has by birth no right. Cf. *Harold: Show-day at Battle Abbey:* "The cuckoo . . . Crying with my false egg I overwhelm The native nest."

173. **Then Bedivere . . . the King.** The character of Bedivere, who, in *The Passing of Arthur*, is the King's last companion —

Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake —
For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King —

"Sir, there be many rumors on this head:
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man:
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief
In all this matter — so ye care to learn —
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne:
And daughters had she borne him, — one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved
To Arthur, — but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love:
But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,

"First made and latest left of all the knights" — is distinctly and consistently painted. He is a plain, blunt, honest soul, who troubles himself little about the doubts and difficulties which beset the belief of others in the right of Arthur's kingship. He takes no account of any supernatural claim, sweeps away all the mystery with which some would surround Arthur's birth, and gives a simple, natural and, to himself at all events, a satisfactory account of Arthur's parentage. Compare his conduct in *The Passing of Arthur*, where, when even the King is shaken by doubts and inward questionings, he will have none of them where he cares nothing for ghosts and dreams, and reckons all mystic portents as the harmless glamour of the field. He feels that Arthur is his true King, and having once made up his mind on the point despises all rumors and never swerves from unquestioning loyalty.

So loathed the bright dishonor of his love,
That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war:
And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther entered in,
And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compassed by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness: afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time,
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Delivered at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come; because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child,
Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake
Of Gorloïs. Wherefore Merlin took the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight,
And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and reared him with her own;

And no man knew. And ever since the lords
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,
So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now,
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
Proclaiming, 'Here is Uther's heir, your king,'
A hundred voices cried, 'Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorloïs he,
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
Or else baseborn.' Yet Merlin through his craft,
And while the people clamored for a king,
Had Arthur crowned; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war."

Then while the King debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorloïs, after death,
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King
Make feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

234. **clamored for a king.** "And at the feast of Pentecost all manner of men assayed to pull at the sword that would assay, but none might prevail but Arthur; and he pulled it out afore all the lords and commons that were there, wherefore all the commons cried at once, We will have Arthur unto our king" (Malory, i. 5).

245. **as he could . . . would,** as liberally as his broken fortunes allowed, not as liberally as he would have wished.

"A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him! Yea, but ye — think ye this King —
So many those that hate him, and so strong,
So few his knights, however brave they be —
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?"

"O King," she cried, "and I will tell thee: few,
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
For I was near him when the savage yells
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
Crowned on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
'Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee.' Then the King in low, deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,

247. **ice on summer seas,** as little likely to endure as ice that has floated into the warmth of southern seas. Icebergs frequently float from the Arctic regions so far south as to be melted by the warm Gulf Stream. Cf. Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House,* **xi. 2:**

"An iceberg in an Indian sea."

259. **in low deep tones . . . coming of a light.** These lines are often quoted as the finest in the poem.

261. **so strait vows.** *Strait* and *strict* are doublets, i.e., words of the same (or a similar) meaning from one root. These vows are briefly enumerated in *Gareth and Lynette:*

"my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter gentleness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

"But when he spake and cheered his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee — I beheld
From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King:
And ere it left their faces, through the cross
And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote

264. **others dazed . . . light**, dazzled, as it were, by the brightness of the revelation of a new life and duties in store for them, which at first they could only partly understand. A picture of this life and its duties is given in *Guinevere:*

> "I made them lay their hands in mine and swear,
> To reverence the King as if he were
> Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
> To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
> To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
> To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
> To honor his own word as if his God's,
> To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
> To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
> And worship her by years of noble deeds,
> Until they won her."

267. **large**, sublime. **comfortable**, comforting, cheering; Tennyson has 'comfortable words,' again in *The Lover's Tale* and in *Queen Mary*, v. 2. So in the Communion Service in the Prayer Book: "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith to all that truly turn to Him."

269. **From eye . . . likeness of the King.** Cf. *The Holy Grail:*

> "and this Galahad when he heard
> My sister's vision, filled me with amaze;
> His eyes became so like her own, they seemed
> Hers, and himself her brother more than I."

273. **Down from the casement**, i.e., through the glass of the "storied window richly dight" with the picture of Christ on the cross.

Flame-color, vert and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

"And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

274. **vert and azure.** Heraldic names for green and blue.

275. **three fair queens.** On the deck of a dark barge which bears Arthur away after his last battle in *The Passing of Arthur*, there also stood "black-stoled, black-hooded" "three queens with crowns of gold" who "put forth their hands and took the king and wept." Bedivere asks if they be not

> "the three whereat we gazed
> On that high day, when clothed with living light,
> They stood before the throne in silence, friends
> Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

278. **at his need.** In the Coronation scene many of the details have a distinctly symbolic reference. The "three fair queens," with the light from the pictured cross falling upon them, probably typify the three Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity. Mage Merlin, "who knew the range of all their arts," may aptly symbolize the Intellect: his knowledge ranges over all human philosophy, but, as his fate, described in *Merlin and Vivien*, shows, it is knowledge without moral restraint or spiritual strength. The Lady of the Lake, who stands near Merlin, "knows a subtler magic than his own," inasmuch as the power of Religion is based on deeper and stronger foundations than those of any philosophy that science can teach. She is clothed in white, the color of purity; incense, the emblem of adoration, curls about her; her face is half hidden in the "dim religious light" of the holy place; her voice mingles with the hymns, and, like the voice of the great multitude saying Alleluia, heard by St. John in the Revelation, sounds "as the voice of many waters"; her dwelling is in eternal calm, where storms cannot reach her; and as our Lord walked on the Galilean waves and stilled their tumult, she can pass over the troubled waters of life and calm them with her footsteps.

"And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own —
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curled about her, and her face
Well-nigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

"There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword

282. **Lady of the Lake.** For Malory's account of "How Arthur by the mean of Merlin gat Excalibur his sword of the Lady of the Lake," see his *Morte Darthur*, i. 23.

284. **samite** is a rich silk stuff interwoven with gold or silver thread; derived from Gk. *hex*, six, and *mitos*, thread of the warp, literally "woven of six threads"; cf. *dimity*. Tennyson has "red samite" and "blackest samite" in *Lancelot and Elaine*, and "crimson samite" in *The Holy Grail*.

285. **his huge cross-hilted sword.** The cross-shaped hilt of the swords of Christian knights, symbolic of their religious belief, was often used as a sacred emblem upon which oaths were taken, and which sometimes reminded them of their vows. Malory (xiv. 9) tells of Sir Percivale how, when sore tempted, "by adventure and grace he saw his sword lie upon the ground all naked, in whose pommel was a red cross, and the sign of the crucifix therein, and bethought him on his knighthood, and his promise made toforehand unto the good man. Then he made the sign of the cross in his forehead, and therewith the pavilion turned up so down, and then it changed unto a smoke and a black cloud, and then he was adread."

294. **Excalibur.** In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, ii. 3, the Lady of the Lake, who had given Arthur the sword, says: "The name of it is Excalibur, that is as much to say as Cut-steel."

That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur rowed across and took it — rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye — the blade so bright

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Chronicle* we read how "Arthur himself, dressed in a breastplate worthy of so great a king, places on his head a golden helmet engraved with the semblance of a dragon. Over his shoulders he throws his shield called *Priwen*, on which a picture of Holy Mary, Mother of God, constantly recalled her to his memory. Girt with *Caliburn*, a most excellent sword, and fabricated in the Isle of Avalon, he graces his right hand with the lance named *Ron*. This was a long and broad spear, well contrived for slaughter." Merlin informed Arthur that Excalibur's scabbard was "worth ten of the sword, for while ye have the scabbard upon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded" (Malory, i. 23).

297. **rich With jewels.** Cf. the description in *The Passing of Arthur*.

298. **elfin Urim.** Fairy jewels of mystic significance. Cf. the description of the "breastplate of judgment" made for the high priest, Bible, *Exodus* xxviii. 15–30: "And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart when he goeth in before the Lord; and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." The Urim and Thummim seem to have been a mysterious contrivance in or on the high priest's breastplate, which was supposed to give oracular responses; it consisted, according to some authorities, either of the four rows of precious stones upon which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed, or of three precious stones, one of which, by some peculiar appearance on it, indicated "Yes," another "No," while the third implied that the answer was neutral. Urim means Light, and Thummim Truth.

299. **the blade . . . by it.** Cf. *Gareth and Lynette:*

> "but this was all of that true steel
> Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
> And lightnings played about it in the storm."

Cf. Malory, i. 7: "Then he drew his sword Excalibur, but it was so bright in his enemies' eyes that it gave light like thirty torches." So also in *The Passing of Arthur*, when Excalibur was cast away, it

> "Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon."

That men are blinded by it — on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
'Take me,' but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
'Cast me away!' And sad was Arthur's face
Taking it, but old Merlin counseled him,
'Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far off.' So this great brand the King
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down."

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and asked,
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
"The swallow and the swift are near akin,
But thou art closer to this noble prince,
Being his own dear sister;" and she said,
"Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I;"
"And therefore Arthur's sister?" asked the King.
She answered, "These be secret things," and signed
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.
And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard; the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, "What know I?
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,

319. **And Gawain . . . half-heard.** The distinction here suggested between the natures of Gawain and Modred is carried out in the other Idylls.

And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
Was Gorloïs, yea and dark was Uther too,
Well-nigh to blackness; but this King is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.
Moreover, always in my mind I hear
A cry from out the dawning of my life,
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
'O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.'"

"Ay," said the King, "and hear ye such a cry?
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?"

"O King!" she cried, "and I will tell thee true:
He found me first when yet a little maid:
Beaten had I been for a little fault
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
And hated this fair world and all therein,
And wept, and wished that I were dead; and he—
I know not whether of himself he came,
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk

329. **fair . . . of men.** Arthur's fairness of complexion is alluded to in *The Passing of Arthur;* see l. 337, p. 231, "with wide blue eyes," and l. 384, p. 234, "his light and lustrous curls." The ancient Britons were generally of a light complexion, and "blonde as an Englishwoman" is still used in France as a description of unusual fairness.

346. **who . . . can walk Unseen.** A common attribute of wizards, generally described as inherent in some magic amulet, dress, ring, or herb that they wore. Cf. Shaks., i. *Henry IV.* iv. 4: "We have the receipt of fern-seed, we walk invisible," and Beaumont and Fletcher, *Fair Maid of the Inn,* i.:

> "Why, did you think that you had Gyges' ring,
> Or the herb that gives invisibility?"

Unseen at pleasure — he was at my side,
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
And dried my tears, being a child with me.
And many a time he came, and evermore
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad
At times he seemed, and sad with him was I,
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
And now of late I see him less and less,
But those first days had golden hours for me,
For then I surely thought he would be king.

"But let me tell thee now another tale:
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,
To hear him speak before he left his life.
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
And when I entered told me that himself
And Merlin ever served about the King,
Uther, before he died; and on the night
When Uther in Tintagil past away
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm

362. **Shrunk like a fairy changeling.** It was an accepted doctrine of fairy lore that wicked fairies had the power to substitute an elf or imp of their own species for a human child. The changeling, however, was soon recognized as no natural offspring by its peevishness and wizened, shriveled appearance; it often resembled a little old man with a face full of puckers and wrinkles. Cf. Shaks., i. *Henry IV.* i. 1:

> "Oh, that it could be proved
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
> In cradle-clothes, our children as they lay."

Descending through the dismal night — a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost —
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seemed in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon winged, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried 'The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!' And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lashed at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter followed calm,
Free sky and stars: 'And this same child,' he said,
'Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace

374. **and all . . . decks.** Contrast this bright vision with the gloomy blackness of the "dusky barge, dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern," which carries Arthur away in *The Passing of Arthur*. The dragon ship is "gone as soon as seen"; the barge glides slowly away till it appears to go

"From less to less and vanish into light."

379. **a ninth one.** Every ninth wave, and in a smaller degree every third, was commonly believed to be larger than those that went before it.

Till this were told.' And saying this the seer
Went through the strait and dreadful pass of death,
Nor ever to be questioned any more
Save on the further side; but when I met
Merlin, and asked him if these things were truth —
The shining dragon and the naked child
Descending in the glory of the seas —
He laughed as is his wont, and answered me
In riddling triplets of old time, and said:

"'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.
Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.
Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

"So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only child,
Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing

401. **riddling triplets of old time.** Cf. *Gareth and Lynette:*

> "'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?
> Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
> Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?'"

The most ancient of the Cambrian Bards wrote in stanzas of three rhyming lines, called *Englyn Milwr*, or "The Warrior's Triplet," each line containing seven syllables. Hence are said to have sprung the Welsh Triads, which contained the Cymric systems of theology, ethics, history, jurisprudence, and bardism. Facts and teachings were strung together in successive groups of three of a kind.

Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old
Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,
And echoed by old folk beside their fires
For comfort after their wage-work is done,
Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Though men may wound him that he will not die,
But pass, again to come; and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king."

She spake, and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing "Shall I answer yea or nay?"
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,

420. **will not die . . . again to come.** The belief in a "second coming" is found in many of the legends of ancient heroes, e.g., in those of Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Desmond, Sebastian of Brazil. Malory, xxi. 7, writes: "Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu in another place. And men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse, 'Hic jacet Arthurus Rex quondam Rexque futurus.'"

429. **a phantom king . . . Crowned.** Mr. Hutton, *Literary Essays*, remarks on this dream: ". . . the dream in which he mingles the story of the actual wars of Arthur against the heathen with the rumors of the still struggling passions of his rebellious subjects, and yet augurs that the grandeur of the King will survive even the history of his deeds — is a splendid embodiment of Tennyson's drift throughout the poem. Grant that a perfect king is a phantom of the human imagination, yet it is a phantom which will haunt it long after what we call the

Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Streamed to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice: and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, "No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;"
Till with a wink his dream was changed, and haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crowned. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honored most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen; — and watched him from the gates:
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and returned
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
To whom arrived, by Dubric, the high saint,

real earth shall have dissolved. . . . Like all true authority, that of the ideal king is hidden in mystery, but the image of his glory in the heavens survives the crumbling of his kingdom on earth."

449. **flowers . . . latter April.** Notice the appropriateness of the season.

452. **Dubric** or Dubritius, archbishop of Caerleon-upon-Usk and primate of Britain. Drayton, *Polyolbion*, xxiv., calls him "St. Dubric, whose report old Caerleon still doth carry."

Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May through open door,
The sacred altar blossomed white with May,
The Sun of May descended on their King,
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
Rolled incense, and there past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two
Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love:
And Arthur said, "Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
"King and my lord, I love thee to the death!"
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,
"Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
And all this Order of thy Table Round
Fulfill the boundless purpose of their King!"

So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine
Great lords from Rome before the portal stood,

454. **The stateliest of her altar-shrines.** Malory, iii. 5, says: "Then was the high feast made ready and the King was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenever in the church of St. Stephen's with great solemnity."

476. **Great lords from Rome.** Malory, v. 1, tells how twelve aged ambassadors of Rome came to King Arthur as ambassadors and messengers from the Emperor Lucius, which was called at that time Dictator or Procuror of the Public Weal of Rome, to demand truage of the realm on the ground of the statutes and

In scornful stillness gazing as they past;
Then while they paced a city all on fire
With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King: —

"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away!
Blow through the living world — 'Let the King reign.'

"Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-ax upon helm,
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

"Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

"Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust,
Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

decrees made by Julius Cæsar, conqueror of the realm. And subsequently we read how Arthur made war against Lucius and smote him with Excalibur, "that it cleft his head from the summit of his head, and stinted not till it came to his breast. And then the emperor fell down dead, and there ended his life."

488. **That God . . . secret word.** Arthur had, doubtless, informed his knights, when swearing them of the Table Round, how authority had been bestowed on him and sanction given to his "boundless purpose" by secret revelation from heaven.

"Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

"Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

"The King will follow Christ, and we the King
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign."

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,
The slow-fading mistress of the world,
Strode in, and claimed their tribute as of yore.
But Arthur spake, "Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;

504. **The slow-fading . . . world.** In the fifth century (about 411) the last of the Roman legions was withdrawn from Britain. Rome needed all her soldiers at home: the Goth was on her track and as an empire she was already on the wane.

506. "**Behold . . . pay.**" Malory, v. 2, tells "how the kings and lords promised to King Arthur aid and help against the Romans." Arthur's reply to the demand for truage is thus given: "I will that ye return unto your lord and Procuror of the Common Weal for the Romans and say to him, Of his demand and commandment I set nothing, and that I know of no truage, ne tribute that I owe to him, ne to none other earthly prince, Christian ne heathen; but I pretend to have and occupy the sovereignty of the empire, wherein I am entitled by the right of my predecessors, sometime kings of this land."

And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay:" so those great lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and through that strength the King
Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned.

511. **your Roman wall.** Agricola drew a line of military stations across the interval, about 40 miles in length, between the Firth of Forth and the Clyde; afterwards, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, this line was fortified by a turf rampart erected on foundations of stone. The Emperor Hadrian caused a rampart of earth to be erected between Newcastle and Carlisle, and Septimius Severus had a stone wall built parallel to Hadrian's rampart and in the same locality. Considerable traces of these walls may still be seen.

517. **twelve great battles.** Some of these battles are enumerated and described in *Lancelot and Elaine.*

GARETH AND LYNETTE

Gareth and Lynette. — This poem was written in the spring and summer of 1872, and published in the autumn of that year. Tennyson said, in a note to that edition: "With this poem the Author concludes *The Idylls of the King*." Afterwards *Balin and Balan* was written, and *Enid* was divided into two parts, thus giving the Arthurian epic its final form.

According to Maccallum, who makes the time of the *Idylls* twelve years, four years elapsed between the events described in *The Coming of Arthur* and those of *Gareth and Lynette*. Others estimate Arthur's reign as twenty-five years or more, eight years being spent in campaigns against the heathen.

Tennyson's chief source of material for this poem was the seventh book of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, wherein is contained "the tale of Sir Gareth of Orkeney, that was called Beaumayns by Sir Kay." From what source Malory derived the story is unknown, but it has a mediaeval French rather than a Keltic flavor. For the first four hundred and thirty lines of his poem, Tennyson is indebted chiefly to his own invention, aided slightly by the story of Peredur in the *Mabinogion*. The poet modifies Malory's story, reducing the time of the action, ending it with the final encounter before the castle and marrying Gareth to Lynette; whereas, in Malory, Gareth is refused admission to the castle, and sent on a quest by Dame Lyonors, who after many adventures becomes his bride.

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring

1. Lot, according to Malory, was the king of Orkeney and Lothian. Bellicent was the daughter of Ygerne, who was the mother of King Arthur.

2. See the remarks in the introduction on the way in which the *Idylls* follow the course of the seasons.

Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted Pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
"How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance if lance
Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,

3. **spate**, a Keltic word, meaning river-flood.

11. Ordinarily "and" would connect "that know" with "have strength and wit;" the omission gives emphasis.

12. In what sense is the word "wit" here used?

14. As a caged bird. See lines 20–23.

18. **yield**, reward, as in Elizabethan English.

20. **discaged**. The word is stronger than "uncaged" because it implies reversal of the action of the verb, while "uncaged" merely expresses negation. Compare "discolored" and "uncolored," "dishonored" and "unhonored."

21. **ever-highering**. Note the unusual use of "higher" as a verb and compare it with the similar, more common, use of "lower."

A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summertime,
Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
'Thou hast half prevailed against me,' said so—he—
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laugh'd,
"Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."
"Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said,
"Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
"Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine

25. **Gawain**, the eldest son of Lot. "Gawain, surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong." He is represented by Tennyson as brave and graceful, but fickle and disloyal. The name is accented on either syllable according to the requirements of the meter.

26. **Modred**. Tennyson departs from the old romances and represents Modred, also, as the brother of Gareth. Jealous, crafty, and evil of heart, Modred turned traitor to his king and brought ruin on himself and others.

27. **proven**, tried; tested.

37. **an**, if; an old use of the word.

40. A fable, such as a child might tell or hear.

Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought
'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught
And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck,
And brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away."

To whom the mother said,
"True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
"Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,

46. **Book of Hours**, a prayer book, illuminated in colors and gold, containing the prayers prescribed for the seven hours at which the Catholic Church orders that prayers be said.

47. **haunting**, frequenting; — the French *hanter*, resort to, haunt.

51. **a leash of kings**, three kings. A leash was the thong by which a hawk or hound was held. Three dogs were usually leashed together, and the word came to be used in the sense of three creatures of a kind, or three in general.

56. **clomb, brake**, old forms of the preterites of the verbs "climb" and "break."

Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been
Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel,
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go."

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said,
"Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the Barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love:

66. **brand Excalibur.** Brand, from an Anglo-Saxon word, meaning burn, was a name applied to a sword, from the flashing of its blade. Excalibur was a wonderful sword of magic power, given to King Arthur by the Lady of the Lake, to be surrendered again into her hands on the passing of the king.

68. **fowl**, birds.

76. **Barons' war**, the war waged against Arthur and his knights by those "barons, lords, and petty kings" who denied Arthur's kingship. How they were defeated in a great battle is told in *The Coming of Arthur*, lines 62–133.

81. **both thy brethren**, Gawain and Modred.

Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man."

Then Gareth, "An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a King, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the King
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —
But to be won by force — and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.

84. **charm**, allure.

85. **jousts**, mock fights, in which knights tilted.

87. **often**. Note the use of the adverb as an adjective.

90. **burns**, streams; an old English word still used in Scotland and northern England.

102. Gareth takes up his mother's words about a bride, and uses his tale of Shame and Fame, as an argument to urge his chivalric desire.

104. **But**, only, — rather than, as usual, except only.

105. **good lack**, an archaic expression implying surprise or pity.

And these were the conditions of the King:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,
That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —
Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one — they call'd her Fame; and one, — O Mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you — Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —
Else, wherefore born?"

To whom the mother said,
"Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King —
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me: yet — wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,

114. **tether'd**, fastened, as an animal tied in a pasture.

116–118. The ideal of the Knights of the Round Table in these days of its prime. Read in *Guinevere*, lines 457–480, the vows by which the king bound his knights.

119–129. Bellicent would fain use the doubt of Arthur's royal right as an argument with her son; but in spite of herself her lips acknowledge, as her heart had always done, his kingship.

124. She doubted him no more than he doubted himself.

126. **easeful biding**, peaceful stay; here, life at home.

Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

And Gareth answer'd quickly, "Not an hour,
So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The Idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be King save him who makes us free?"

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily, "Will ye walk thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother, — I demand."

133–134. According to the old romances, Arthur refused to pay tribute to the Roman ambassadors,

> "Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
> To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,"

and successfully defended himself against their attempts to compel the payment. There is no historical foundation for this statement.

135. **Idolaters**, the heathen Saxon invaders whom Arthur "in twelve great battles overcame," according to the legends.

139. **unwaveringly one**, always the same, desiring to go to Arthur's court.

140. Gareth's impulsive words, "I will walk through fire," suggest to his mother a test which she trusts he will reject, — the smoky service of a kitchen knave.

142. **proof**, test.

And Gareth cried,
"A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!"

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,
"Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to anyone.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

147. the proof to prove me to the quick, the test to test me in the most sensitive part. Quick, from the Anglo-Saxon *cwic*, alive, means living flesh; the feelings; the part of body or mind most susceptible of feeling.

149. Prince. She reminds her son of the rank which he must lay aside for the meanest servitude.

151. kitchen-knaves, kitchen servants. Knave, from the Anglo-Saxon, *cnafa*, boy, came gradually to mean servant; thence, sly fellow; thence, villain. Can you trace the connection of thought which underlies the changes in meaning?

152. across the bar, across the buttery bar, over which the kitchen servants handed the food to those waiting in the dining hall.

154. a twelvemonth and a day, a full year.

157. villain, low, base. Villain was originally a freeman of the lowest rank. It came to mean one low in manners and morals also; hence, as now, a scoundrel, a rascal.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,
"The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,
When waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easterday.

162. **thrall**, an Anglo-Saxon word borrowed from the Norse, meaning one who runs on errands; hence, a servant.

169. Note how the meter here gives the effect of delay.

172. **his outward purpose.** His openly announced purpose to depart was yet inwardly disturbed by his unwillingness to cause his mother pain.

176. **still**, always; continually. This is a use common in Elizabethan English.

So when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no further, lord.
Here is a city of Enchanters, built
By fairy Kings." The second echo'd him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To Northward, that this King is not the King,

185. **Camelot**, the city where Arthur held his court. Its location was vaguely indicated in the old romances; Caxton says it was in Wales, and later writers have tried to identify it with the villages of Camel in Somersetshire. In a prose sketch, written about 1830, Tennyson says: "On the latest limit of the West, in the land of Lyonnesse, where, save the rocky Isles of Scilly, all is now wild sea, rose the sacred Mount of Camelot. It rose from the deeps with gardens and bowers and palaces, and at the top of the Mount was King Arthur's hall, and the holy Minster with the cross of gold. Here dwelt the king in glory apart, while the Saxons whom he had overthrown in twelve battles ravaged the land, and ever came nearer and nearer.

"The Mount was the most beautiful in the world, sometimes green and fresh in the beam of morning, sometimes all one splendor, folded in the golden mists of the West. But all underneath it was hollow, and the mountain trembled when the seas rushed bellowing through the porphyry caves; and there ran a prophecy that the mountain and the city, on some wild morning, would topple into the abyss and be no more."

191. **Prick'd**, penetrated. What picturesque value has the word, as used here by the poet?

But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress

200. **changeling.** According to popular superstition, a child left by the fairies in place of one stolen from its cradle. For fuller account of the legends about Arthur's origin, read *The Coming of Arthur*, lines 177–393.

201. Note Tennyson's use of the strong old preterite. **sorcery**, magic.

202. **glamour**, enchantment.

205. **enow**, an obsolete form of the word "enough."

210. What is the keystone of an arch?

212–226. **The Lady of the Lake.** Tennyson gave to the water fairy of the old romance an allegorical, spiritual significance, making her represent religion. She it was who gave to King Arthur his sword Excalibur, representing, probably, the temporal power of the church. This passage "is an allegory of the power of religion in sustaining the fabric of society. The forms of the church are forever changing and flowing like water, but her great arms are stretched out immovable like the cross. The sword is the symbol of her justice, the censer is the symbol of her adoration, and both bear the marks of time and strife. The drops that fall from her hands are the water of baptism, and the fish is the ancient sign of the name of Christ. The three queens who sit up aloft are the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity." — VAN DYKE: *The Poetry of Tennyson.*

Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld:
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures, that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they call'd
To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

216. **either**, each of two.

217. **sword.** See Ephesians vi. 17.

219. **the sacred fish.** The Greek word for fish is ΙΧΘΥΣ, the letters of which form the initials of the phrase, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. The fish thus came to be the symbol of Christian faith; it was carved on the tombs of the catacombs, and the word was used as a watch-word by the persecuted Christians.

221. **Arthur's wars**, representing, probably, the soul's battles.

222. **co-twisted**, twisted together.

223. **inveterately**, rather in the sense of inextricably than with its present meaning; as if rooted and grown together.

229. **dragon-boughts**, the bends and coils of the dragon's tail. The early English *bought*, of which bout is a form, meant bend or turn. **elvish**: mysterious, rather than, as usual, fairy-like.

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
So long, that ev'n to him they seem'd to move.
Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.
Back from the gate started the three, to whom
From out thereunder came an ancient man,
Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons?"

Then Gareth, "We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see
The glories of our King: but these, my men,
(Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)
Doubt if the King be King at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth."

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him
And saying, "Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King

239. **share**, plowshare.

248. **Seer**, literally, one who sees; hence, one who sees that which is hidden from others; a prophet; wizard. **playing on him**, making sport of him. Compare *Hamlet*, iii. 2. 380.

249–251. He describes the effects of mirage, an optical illusion which makes distant objects appear near at hand and inverted.

254–274. Elsdale, in his *Studies in the Idylls*, says: "The fairy king and fairy queens who come from a sacred mountain cleft towards the sunrise (that is, Parnassus) to build the city,

And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become

are the old mythologies whose birthplace was the East, the land of the rising sun. From them, besides the religions of the ancient world, are derived poetry, architecture, sculpture; all those elevating and refining arts and sciences which were called into existence mainly and primarily as the expression and embodiment of religious feeling. These, with all that whole circle of unnumbered influences, mental, moral, or religious, derived from the experiences of the past, with which they are associated, constitute the city in which the soul dwells, — the sphere in which it works, and the surrounding atmosphere in which it breathes.

"The city is built to music; for as the harmony and proportion of sound constitute music, so the harmony and proportion of all the various elements and powers which go to make up the man will constitute a fitting shrine for the ideal soul. 'Therefore never built at all;' for the process of assimilating and working up into one harmonious whole all the various external elements is continually going on and unending. 'Therefore built forever;' for since harmonious and proportionate development is the continual law, the city will always be complete and at unity with itself." The poet would probably have said that the critic pressed the allegory too far. "Of course," said he, "Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces, is everywhere symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions, and of the spiritual development of man. Yet there is no single fact or incident in the *Idylls*, however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever."

258. **Troy and Thebes were so built, according to the Greek legends.**

A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever."

Gareth spake
Anger'd, "Old Master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?"

But the Seer replied,
"Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:
'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion'?
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who

275. **thine own beard**, the sign of your age.

280. **the Riddling of the Bards.** The Keltic bard was a poet who sang to the accompaniment of his harp the deeds of chiefs and kings; he was often supposed to have prophetic powers. His prophecies were often so worded as to be, as here, of doubtful meaning; often they had one meaning to the ear, but were capable of a different interpretation, according to the event.

283. This is a reference to Gareth's assertion, "We be tillers of the soil."

Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said, "My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer
He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
And stately, rich in emblem and the work
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass

287. **brook**, endure.

291. Why does Gareth call his falsehood a "white lie"?

298. **did their days in stone**, left as record of their lives, works of architecture and sculpture.

299. **Merlin**, the famous magician of the old romances. He it was who received Arthur as a babe, and later had him crowned; he —

> "Built the king his havens, ships, and halls,
> Was also Bard and knew the starry heavens;
> The people called him Wizard."

Read what is said about him in *The Coming of Arthur* and *Merlin and Vivien*. **Mage**, magician.

Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendour of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom — and look'd no more —
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,
Clear honor shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King,
"A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft

306. **bower**, chamber, as in old English.

314. **doom**, judgment; decision for or against a person, but usually against him.

321. **ranged**, stood in order.

327. **boon**, a gift; usually, that which is granted in answer to prayer. **Uther**, a king of the Britons, who succeeded his

From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field."

Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or field?"
To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye."

And Arthur, "Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!"

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the Barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.

brother, Aurelius Ambrosius (or Emrys). Aurelius, says the historian Green, was "a descendant of the last Roman general who claimed the purple as an emperor in Britain."

330. **for**, because; an archaic use of the word.

333. **Whether**, which of the two. This is another archaism. See Matthew xxi. 31.

337. **thrice the gold**, thrice the sum offered by Uther.

340. **Accursed, who**, accursed be he who.

348. **held with these**, took part with these.

Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead;
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son."

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! ev'n that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall —
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur, "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!

351. **seized**, possessed of; originally, took possession of by legal authority; then took hold of by force, with or without right.

355. **wreak**, an obsolescent word, meaning avenge; it takes as object either the name of the offense or, as here, of the person offended.

359. **Sir Kay**, the foster brother of Arthur whom the king made steward of his house and lands; he was ill-tempered and rough of speech. **seneschal**, steward; originally, old (i.e., chief) servant.

362. **gyve**, fetter. **gag**, an instrument inserted in the mouth to prevent speech. "In old times scolding women were sometimes tied in a chair called the ducking stool, and an iron muzzle (called a Branks, or gossip's bridle) was fastened on their heads." — *Littledale*. This instrument of punishment was used in New England in colonial days.

The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames,
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence —
Lest that rough humor of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die."

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savor in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king,
Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,

366. **had**, would have.

367. See note on line 327.

376. **Mark**, the cowardly and treacherous king of Cornwall; he murdered his own brother and his nephew, Tristram. Malory says that he was first the friend of Arthur, but Tennyson represents him as the king's enemy throughout.

380. **charlock**, the wild mustard, which has yellow blossoms.

383. **Delivering**, reporting; giving the message. **vassal**, dependent; the original and the present meaning of the word is servant dependent; in feudal law, a vassal was one who held land of a superior, to whom he rendered homage and military service.

386. **goodly**, having good qualities; well-favored. **cousin**,

And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"
For, midway down the side of that long hall
A stately pile, — whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields, —
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named:
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain,
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare without a sign
Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,

kinsman. Tristram was his nephew, the son of his sister. Cousin was "formerly applied to a near relative, generally not in the restricted modern sense." This is the Shakespearean use of the word. **Tristram**, one of the bravest knights of Arthur's court.

391. **fealty**, loyalty; especially that of a vassal to his overlord.

392. **cried to rend**, cried that they should rend.

398. **blazon'd**, having his coat of arms painted on it.

399. **range**, row.

And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

"More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever — craven — a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!"

And many another suppliant crying came
With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

411. **reave**, deprive; we still use the participle reft.

419. **churl**, a man of humble birth, without its later acquired meaning of rude and sordid. Give in your own words the meaning of lines 417–418.

422. **lap**, wrap; fold. **cloth of lead**: a coffin or winding sheet made of lead.

423. **craven**, coward.

425. **No fault of thine.** This is addressed to Mark's messenger.

427. This was Mark's way. See the last line of *The Last Tournament.*

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),
For see ye not how weak and hungerworn
I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight."

To him the King,
"A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine."

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen,

"Lo ye now!
This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,

431. From this point Tennyson follows, in the main, the story as told in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

436. seem, Gareth cannot bring himself to speak a direct falsehood to the king.

444. Wan-sallow, colorless; both words mean pale.

444–445. A plant which is diseased because the sap is drawn away from its roots by a parasite lichen.

447. God wot, God knows. brewis, broth; literally, that which is boiled.

Like any pigeon will I cram his crop.
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog."

Then Lancelot standing near, "Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
Large, fair and fine!—Some young lad's mystery—
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

Then Kay, "What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me."

449. **crop**, the craw of a bird.

452. **Sleuth-hound**, a bloodhound which follows the sleuth, that is the track, of a man or beast. **fluent**, flowing; this is the literal meaning of the word, which is seldom used in prose except with reference to language.

457. Whether of low birth or royal rank, the boy has a noble nature.

461. Sir Kay possibly alludes to the poisoning of King Aurelius, Arthur's uncle.

465. **Sir Fair-hands.** In *Morte Darthur* Sir Kay calls Gareth Beaumains, Pretty Hands, and by this name he is called throughout the story.

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bowed himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field —
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,

469. **The sooty yoke.** Chimneys were unknown in England until after the thirteenth century; the smoke from hall and kitchen fire escaped as best it could, through holes in walls and roof. "A sooty yoke" might be regarded as the badge of kitchen service.

471. **couch'd,** stayed or sojourned by night; an archaic use of the word.

474. **harry,** here, annoy; literally, lay waste, as with an army.

476. **broach,** spit; a small, pointed bar on which meats were put to roast.

489. **tarns,** small mountain lakes, especially those which have no visible feeders.

On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
"He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die"—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights,

490. **Caer-Eryri**, Snowdon's summit. Eyri is the same word as eyrie, eagle's nest.

492. **Isle Avilion**, the island valley of Avilion, called in *The Palace of Art* the "Vale of Avalon." This fortunate isle, or valley of perpetual summer, was the Keltic Paradise. "In those harrying days such an island refuge, sanctified by use and tradition, was a beatific vision, and men idealized it as they idealized the Island of the Blest, and gave to it every beautiful attribute they could imagine."

496. **roundelay**, a poem which has a line, or lines, which comes round or is repeated again and again.

504. Observe similes and metaphors drawn from Tennyson's observation of nature.

Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end —
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee —
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —
Descend into the city:" whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.

519. Between the increasing and decreasing moon, — that is to say, at full moon.

524. A rough imitation of the tournament lists.

528. **Peter's knee**, the gate of Heaven, of which the Apostle Peter was said to have the key.

529. **These news.** News was formerly regarded as plural instead of singular as now. **be**, an old southern English form of the third person plural.

Make me thy knight — in secret! let my name
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answered him,
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees,
"My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing."

And the King —
"Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know."

535. **quest**, search, especially one of knightly adventure.
540. **yield thee thine**, grant you the place which belongs to you by right of birth.
542. **utter**, literally, outer; beyond limits; hence, as here, entire; greatest. **hardihood**, boldness in action, especially in encountering difficulty or danger.
549. **mellow**, mild and sweet, like fully ripe fruit.

"Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!"

And the King — 556
"But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of."

Merrily Gareth ask'd, 560
"Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day."
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly 565
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,
"I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away. 570
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain."

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow

561. Observe Gareth's allusions to his kitchen vassalage.

566. According to Malory, Gareth was knighted by Lancelot to whom, and not to the king, he revealed his name after an encounter between them. This encounter, which Malory describes as taking place at the beginning of Gareth's quest, Tennyson represents as occurring near its end.

570. **far away**, at a distance.

571. **lions on thy shield.** Tennyson describes Lancelot's coat of arms as being azure lions rampant, crowned with gold.

May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower;
She into hall past with her page and cried,

"O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, everyone that owns a tower
The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till ev'n the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood it is a sin to spill."

"Comfort thyself," said Arthur, "I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?"

"My name?" she said—
"Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river

575. **May-blossom**, the white hawthorne, which blooms in the month of May.
581. **bandits**, robbers; originally, proclaimed outlaws.
584. **the lonest hold**, the loneliest, most remote castle.
586. **that best blood**, the sacramental wine, typical of the blood of Christ.
587. **I nor mine, neither I nor mine.**

Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him:
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him, thy chief man
Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow,
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd,
"Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

"They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who always rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.

603. **purport**, purpose.
607. **a holy life**, that of a nun.
610. **this Order**, that of the Knights of the Round Table.
616. **from the moment**, according to the whim of the moment.

He names himself the Night and oftener Death,
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King — this quest!" then — for he mark'd
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull —
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight —
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the May-white: she lifted either arm,

624. **mounted**, surmounted.

626. **scape**, escape, — of which, however, it is not a shortened form. Compare "state" and "estate," similar independent words.

634. Why does Gareth proclaim himself a kitchen-knave instead of revealing the fact that he is a prince ?

641-2. Give in your own words the meaning of this sentence.

642. Littledale says: "Although Tennyson's Lynette reviles Gareth for a time, she does it through indignation at the affront that she supposes Arthur to have put upon herself and her sister by his sending a kitchen-knave to be their champion. She is not really a 'damoysel saveage,' but an independent and high-spirited girl, with some sharpness of tongue and some pride.

"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave."

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one, that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze: and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A warhorse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him:
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held

though of a subduable sort." Study the character of Lynette, and see to what extent you agree with this estimate of it.

646. **lane**, here used in its original sense of narrow passage; the way through the crowd, which led to the king.

647. **slope**, sloping.

651. **gave upon**, opened on.

655. **blowing**, blossoming.

658. **that**, so that, a use common in Elizabethan English.

665. **maiden shield**, a shield without a coat of arms, belonging to the knight who was yet to be proved. Compare the phrases "maiden knight" and "maiden speech." **casque**, helmet.

The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it like a fuel-smother'd fire,
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and grasp a spear, of grain
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
"God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,

670–673. Compare with this description the passage in *The Two Voices* describing the egress of the dragon fly from its chrysalis.

673. **harness**, armor; especially the defensive armor of a knight and his horse.

674. Malory represents Gareth as being without shield and spear until he wins them in the contest with Sir Kay.

675. **donn'd**, put on.

687. **his cause**, the feeling which led him to fight.

His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms — the King hath past his time —
My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone! — my knave! — belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime —
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.
Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again."

But Lancelot said,
"Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,

693. **past his time**, entered his dotage.
695. What double meaning has fire in this line?
703. **peacock'd**, rendered vain; an archaic use of the word. The peacock, in modern simile, is the type of vainglory.

But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword."
"Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:"
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel, "Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than — O sweet heaven! O fie upon him —
His kitchen-knave."

To whom Sir Gareth drew
(And there were none but few goodlier than he)
Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose

717–718. Compare the departure of Sir Kay with that of Gareth, lines 680–685.

721. **lackt**, missing; not obtainable, as in Elizabethan English.

726. **none but few**, only a few.

729. **agaric**, a fungus, some species of which are offensive in smell. **holt**, wood, — as in Chaucer,

> "Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breth
> Inspired hath in every holt and heeth."

730. **carrion**, carcass; dead, decaying flesh.

With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind," for there was Kay.
"Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth."

And Gareth to him,
"Master no more! too well I know thee, ay —
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall."
"Have at thee then," said Kay: they shock'd, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
"Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke.

"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master — thou! —
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon! — to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before."

739. **Have at thee**, take care; be on your guard; a warning of attack. **shock'd**, came together in fight.
742. **shingle**, coarse, round gravel, such as is found on the seashore.
746. **fellowship**, company.
749. **unhappiness**, bad luck. Happy originally meant lucky.
751. **loon**, base fellow.

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answer'd gently, "say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore."

"Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile
That maddeu'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknaved.

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;

763. **assay**, endeavor.

766. **beknaved**, called knave. The prefix sometimes adds this sense of naming or calling to a verb, but more frequently has the force of making, or making like; as, "bedrench," "bedeafen."

771. **spit**, sword, — so-called with contemptuous reference to Gareth's kitchen vassalage.

773. **evensong**, vespers, the church services held about sunset.

Then after one long slope was mounted, saw
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a servingman
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
"They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee."
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
"Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, blackshadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
Three with good blows he quieted, but three
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside

778. **mere**, a pool, usually of stagnant water. The original meaning of the word is dead; hence, stagnant.

779. **Eagle-owl**, a large species of owl, found occasionally in Great Britain.

779–780. "The comparison between the pool, gleaming red in the twilight, and the eye of an eagle-owl, burning round and bright in the darkness, may have the fault of being too uncommon to really illustrate the description, but it is a simile that an ornithologist can appreciate. Indeed, a book might be written on the bird lore of Tennyson, as has been well done by Mrs. Harting in the case of Shakspeare." — *Littledale*.

785. **straitlier**, more strictly.

791. **haling**, an old form of hauling, meaning, draw violently.

793. **quieted**, in the silence of death.

Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
And under this wan water many of them
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
What guerdon will ye?"

Gareth sharply spake,
"None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage?"

799. **caitiff**, base. Caitiff, originally meaning captive, came by degrees to signify one worthless or wicked; a scoundrel.

800. **wreak'd**. See line 363.

802. **my thief**, the thief in the woods of which he was "the cleanser." **vermin**, any small, obnoxious animal.

804. **wan**, pale; hence, colorless; hence, as here, dark. Wan is an epithet often applied to water in the old ballad poetry.

806. **grimly**, grim; an unusual use of the adverb for the adjective.

809. **fain**, gladly. **worshipfully**, with fitting dignity and respect.

810. **guerdon**, reward; something given as acknowledgment of merit or service.

813. **harborage**, lodging; place of shelter,—originally, for an army.

Whereat the Baron saying, "I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh
Broke from Lynette, "Ay, truly of a truth,
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave! —
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harborage,
Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor and a rich,
His towers where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
And many a costly cate, received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the Baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,

815. **Arthur's Table,** the Round Table, the order of knighthood founded by King Arthur. Its members were bound by their vows to courtesy and courage.

820. **rout,** originally, a defeat, breaking the rank of a body of troops; hence, a disorderly flight; or, as here, a disorderly crowd; rabble.

828. **cate,** food; often rich food; dainty.

829. **peacock in his pride,** a peacock adorned with its own gay plumage. This was a dish often served at mediæval banquets of state.

832. **Meseems,** it seems to me.

And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night—
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd—
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him—
Him—here—a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
Now look'd at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
And, seating Gareth at another board,
Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

"Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
And saver of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back

839. **frontless**, bold; shameless.

844. **stick swine**, butcher swine, by sticking a knife into the throat.

847. Why was the knight "half-ashamed"? Compare his treatment of Gareth with Lynette's.

To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine **avail,**
The saver of my life."

And Gareth said,
"Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell."

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
"Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied,

"I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee: then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously,
"Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find

862. **avail,** advantage.

871. **stoat,** a small animal of the weasel kind. **isled,** lodged together in the same island. "It is a well known fact that wild animals, under the influence of terror of either water or fire, will take refuge on the same place and not molest one another. There are some famous pictures of the Deluge that illustrate such occurrences." — *Littledale.*

873. **ruth, pity;** compassion.

My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
Rough thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, nay," she said,
"Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd: he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair

881. **hers**, Cinderella's. The story is ancient and widespread.
888. **pavilion**, tent.
889. **Lent-lily**, the yellow daffodil, so-called because it blossoms about the time of Lent.
891. **banneret**, a small flag; especially, one suspended from the end of a lance.

All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him, shone
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him, "Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave."

Said Gareth, "Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,
"A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!

908. **Avanturine**, a kind of quartz containing sparkling scales of mica. The word is more correctly spelled aventurine.
922. **liefer**, rather, — an archaic word.
923. **missay**, slander; say ill of me, — an archaic use of the word.

Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest.
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not break, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,
The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

934. **lightly**, quickly, — an archaism.

935. **Avoid**, go away; leave your place; the original meaning of avoid is make empty. **beseemeth**, is becoming or suitable to.

937. Why does Gareth here first declare his rank, instead of revealing it to Sir Kay, Lynette, or the lord whom he rescued in the wood?

939. **central bridge**, the center of the bridge.

941. **catapult**, an ancient engine of warfare, used for throwing missiles, such as spears and stones.

943. **drew**, drew their swords, to continue the fight.

946. **Well-stricken**, well struck, — an old form of the participle.

948. **grovelling**, lying prostrate, or on the face.

Then cried the fall'n, "Take not my life: I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me
Good — I accord it easily as a grace."
She reddening, "Insolent scullion: I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"
"Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine — farewell; and, damsel, thou,
Lead, and I follow."

And fast away she fled.
Then when he came upon her, spake, "Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge
The savor of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:
I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang,
"'O morning star' (not that tall felon there
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown),
'O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me.'

956. **hardy**, bold.

971. **felon**, criminal; one wicked in heart or act; originally, a traitor.

"But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford —
The second brother in their fool's parable —
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly,
"Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave —
The knave that doth thee service as full knight
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing."

"Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

"Ay, ay," she said, "but thou shalt meet thy match."

979. **parable**, allegory. See lines 1166–1179.
980. **to boot**, with advantage.
990. **worry**, fight, as a dog, by seizing and throttling. This was the old meaning of the word, but it has come to mean tease, vex.
994–997. Which is right, Lynette or Gareth?
996. **worship**, honor.

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
Ten thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
"What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?"
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
"Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
"Ugh!" cried the Sun, and visoring up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,

1001. **Burnish'd to blinding**, polished so that it dazzled the eyes which looked upon it.

1002. What is this flower?

1008. Gareth, bearing the shield of the Morning Star is mistaken for him. **marches**, the regions along the boundary line. March, from the Anglo Saxon, *marc*, mark, fixed point, is the frontier, the boundary between adjoining lands. In history the word is applied especially to the border regions between England and Scotland, or England and Wales.

1012. **visoring**, covering with the visor, the movable front part of the helmet.

1013. **cipher**, expressionless, like the cipher which, of itself, denotes nothing.

1014. **Push'd**, urged; spurred.

The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King.
"Myself when I return will plead for thee."
"Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led.
"Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?"
"Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

"'O Sun' (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness),
'O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of lovesong or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

"'O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King

1039. **presence**, bearing; personal appearance.

Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

"'O birds, that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare
(So runs thy fancy) these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay," she cried,
"Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins

1048. The boar's head, a favorite dish at mediæval banquets, was served with sprigs of rosemary and of bay in the nose, ears, and mouth.

1052. mavis, thrush. merle, blackbird.

1060. treble bow, three arches.

That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried,

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?"

"Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys."
Said Gareth, "Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening."

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
"Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,

1068. **so**, even if.
1072. **ward**, place to ward or protect. Ward and guard were originally one and the same.
1075. **disaster**, evil fortune; originally, misfortune brought by an unfavorable star. There is a suggestion here of the old superstition that a man's fate was controlled by the stars which presided at his birth.
1086. **grizzled**, gray; gray haired.

And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labor'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!"
He half despairs; so Gareth seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while.
"Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-knave —
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round —
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin —
Strike — strike — the wind will never change again."
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,

1094. **drawn**, with drawn sword.
1099. **Foredooming**, judging beforehand, especially in an unfavorable sense.

And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
"I have thee now;" but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining ev'n his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
"Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said,
"I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

1117. **Southwesterns**, southwest winds, which are the most violent on the southern coast of England. **ridge**, high waves, as often in Tennyson.

"Nowhere could we more opportunely call attention to Mr. Tennyson's extraordinary felicity and force in the use of metaphor and simile.

"This gift appears to have grown with his years, alike in abundance, truth, and grace. As the showers descend from heaven to return to it in vapor, so Mr. Tennyson's loving observation of nature and his Muse seem to have had a compact of reciprocity well kept on both sides. — Sometimes applying the metaphors of Art to Nature, he more frequently draws the materials of his analogies from her inexhaustible book, and however often he may call for some new and beautiful vehicle of illustration, she seems never to withhold an answer. With regard to this particular and very critical gift, it seems to us that he may challenge comparison with almost any poet, either of ancient or modern times." — *Gladstone.*

"'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.'

"Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art."

"Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,
Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:

1130. **trefoil**, a plant, the leaves of which have three cups or divisions; in particular, any one of the clovers.
1131. Why is the rainbow spoken of as having three colors?
1141. **mazed my wit**, amazed my mind.
1143. **mistrusted**, thought distrustfully.
1144. **handle scorn**, make use of scorn.
1145. **cope**, deal with; usually, to strive on equal terms.
1150. **waywardness**, perverseness; literally, a-way-wardness.

And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary

1155. **hern**, heron.

1156. **Lets down his other leg**, after long standing upon one, according to his habit.

1160. **baken**, the old participle of bake.

1163. **Anon**, in a little while; soon. This is its acquired meaning. It originally meant at once. **comb**, or combe, a hollow in a hillside.

1170. **taken but the form**, adopted the names, but not perceived nor profited by the real meaning of the allegory.

1172–1173. The Gelt is a stream in Cumberland, England. On a cliff overhanging it is an inscription rudely carved in Roman

Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —
"PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES" — "HESPERUS" —
"NOX" — "MORS," beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?"

For one — delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops —
His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;
But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch

letters by the vexillary, or standard bearer, of the second legion. From the inscription we gather that a detachment of this legion was stationed here in the year 207 A.D.

This comparison is an instance of the way in which Tennyson drew his illustrations from his own individual experience and observation.

1174. **Phosphorus** (Latin), the Morning Star. **Meridies** (Latin), midday. **Hesperus** (Latin), the Evening Star.

1175. **Nox** (Latin), night. **Mors** (Latin), death.

1177. **running down**, pursuing closely; usually, pursuing until overtaken or captured.

1184. **error**, wandering.

1189. See line 964, and note on line 1071.

1190. **prick'd**, spurred.

Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:
Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"
"Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —
Device and sorcery and unhappiness —
Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answer'd, "Prince,
O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,
As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

Then Gareth, "Thou — Lancelot! — thine the hand
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant, "Lancelot,
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,

1200. Why does Gareth take this time to declare his rank to Lynette?

Who being still rebuked, would answer still
Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd
And only wondering wherefore played upon:
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and for ever."

And Lancelot said,
"Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise
To call him shamed, who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled, hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight,
Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,
"Ay well — ay well — for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks

And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed.
"Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep—
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot"—and she clapt her hands—
"Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment."

Said Lancelot, "Peradventure he, you name,
May know my shield. Let Gareth, and he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well
As he that rides him." "Lancelot-like," she said,
"Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

1251. lusty, vigorous.

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield;
"Ramp ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord! —
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go."

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's harp tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"
An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!"
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,
"Yield, yield him this again: 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;

1273. **Ramp,** leap; rear, as a beast for the spring. It was in this position that the lions on Lancelot's coat of arms were represented.

1281. **Arthur's harp,** this is thought by some to be the constellation of the Great Bear; by others, the Little Bear. The reference to it in *The Last Tournament* —

"Dost thou know the star
We call the Harp of Arthur up in heaven?"

would imply that it was a single star and not a constellation.

1285. **pealing,** sounding a note on the trumpet, in sign of victory.

Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appall me from the quest."

"Nay, Prince," she cried,
"God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,
And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad and girl — yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus — and not else!"

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry

1298. **Appall,** frighten; originally, grow pale; then, make pale; hence, frighten.
1305. **closing in,** containing.
1306. **tare,** tore, the old preterite.
1314. **devisings,** devices.

When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth, "Here be rules. I know but one —
To dash against mine enemy and to win.
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee," sigh'd
Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the gloomy crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down

1318. **fineness**, finesse; dexterity. **Instant**, urgent and eager, —an archaic use of the word.

1324. **palling**, covering, as with a pall.

1325. **palfrey**, a saddle horse, especially one for a woman, as distinguished from a war horse.

1330. **marge**, a poetic form of margin.

1336. **Came lights and lights**, lights appeared here and there in succession.

And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince
Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten steps —
In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,
"Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?" But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

1348. **fleshless laughter**, a grinning skull.
1362. **prickled**, stood on end with awe.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink the terror, saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, "Knight,
Slay me not: my three brethren bad me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dream'd the passes would be past."
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bad me do it.
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance

1367. **blink the terror**, shrink from looking at the terrifying sight.

1371. **clove**, cleft.

1372. **throughly**, thoroughly; the words are one and the same.

1377. **stay the world**, keep away the world.

1386. From here on Tennyson deviates from the story as told by Malory. Instead of sending Gareth on other quests at the behest of Lady Lyonors, who in the end becomes his bride,

And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he, that told it later, says Lynette.

Tennyson represents the knight as welcomed at once to the castle and becoming the accepted suitor of Lynette.

1391. **lived,** prevailed. **won the quest,** accomplished his adventure.

1392. **he,** Malory.

1394. **he,** Tennyson.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE *

THE ARGUMENT. — On his way to Camelot to joust, *incognito*, for the last and greatest of the nine diamonds offered as prizes by King Arthur, Lancelot spends the night at Astolat, the castle of Elaine's father. Here, unwittingly, he wins Elaine's love. At the joust, whither he is accompanied by Lavaine, Lancelot, wearing her sleeve of pearls on his helmet, is sorely wounded. Elaine learns of this, and, with her father's consent, goes to him, and nurses him through his serious illness. Recovering, he returns with her and her brother to Astolat for his shield, left with her that he might not be recognized by it. Here she confesses to him her love. Unable to give his own in return, he tenderly, yet without farewell, departs. Elaine sickens and dies; but not till her father has promised her that, with the letter she has written to Lancelot and the Queen in her dead hand, she shall be dressed in her richest white, placed on the deck of the barge, and rowed up the river to the palace. This is done; and the majestic poem concludes with the appearance of her body at Court, and the burial, with a painful interview between the King and Lancelot, and with Lancelot's sad reflections.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east

* "*Elaine* still remains, for pathetic sweetness and absolute beauty of narrative and rhythm, dearest to the heart of maiden, youth, or sage." — Stedman's *Victorian Poets*.

2. **lily maid**, so named from the delicate hue of her face. Called, in some of the romances, Elaine *la Blanche*, the White.

Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then, fearing rust or soilure, fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and, entering, barr'd her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God

4. **sacred** in her eyes.

7. **soilure**, soil, stain, dirt — an old word.

9. **blazon'd**, applied in heraldry to the figures portrayed on the shield or other armor. Fr. *blâson*, a coat of arms.

12. **nestling**. Elaine embroidered on the case all the figures of the shield and in the same **tinct** (tint, color), and added fancy pictures of branch and flower and birds. *Nestling* from *nest*, root *nas*, to go to, visit, and the double diminutive suffix *l-ing*. Cf. *gosling* = *goose-l-ing*.

19. **dint**, same as *dent*, a blow, the impression made by the blow. Here and ordinarily both *dint* and *dent* are metonymies, the name of the effect standing for that of the cause.

Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down
And saved him: so she lived in Fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?
He left it with her when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him king,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonnesse,
Had found a glen, gray boulder, and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met,
And fought together; but their names were lost.
And each had slain his brother at a blow,
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into color with the crags:

27. **him**, Lancelot. Poets, even, are ambiguous in their use of personal pronouns.

31. **diamond**, same word as *adamant*. From two Gr. words, *a*, not, and *damaein*, to subdue. The thing named from its hardness; nothing, it was supposed, could wear it away, or subdue it. *Tame* is the same word as *damaein*, and illustrates Grimm's Law. **jousts**, encounters on horseback — fully described in the poem.

35. **Lyonnesse**, a district of Cornwall, said now to be buried under the sea.

36. **tarn**, a pool. A Norse word, as is also **boulder**. A boulder is a detached rock. The noise it makes in thundering to the plains below gives it its name, which is related, as is *bull*, to *bellow*.

44. **lichen'd**, a participle from no verb. *Lichen* is the name

And he that once was king had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and, turning on its rims,
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king."

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights.
Saying, "These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the king's —
For public use: henceforward let there be,
Once every year, a joust for one of these:
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land

of a flowerless, parasitic plant, fastening upon stones, rails, and, here, upon bones.

46. **aside**, on each side.

53. **shingly scaur**, both Norse words, meaning here the steep, rocky banks of the tarn, covered with a coarse gravel. *Shingle* allied to *sing* — the thing so named from the noise the foot makes in treading upon it.

62. **needs**, necessarily, from noun *need* with an A.-S. genitive ending *s* or *es*.

65. **heathen**, the Anglo-Saxons, with whom Arthur was so long warring. How did the present meaning of *pagan* and *heathen* come from the old? See *Webster*.

Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke:
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purpose to present them to the Queen
When all were won; but meaning all at once
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
Hard on the river nigh the place which now
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
"Are you so sick, my Queen, you can not move
To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye know it."
"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
He, thinking that he read her meaning there,
"Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
Than many diamonds," yielded; and a heart,

67. **still**, as in Shakespeare, always, constantly.

76. **world's hugest**, London, and the **river**, Thames. **let proclaim**, caused to be proclaimed.

80. **lord.** The etymology of *lord* and *lady* are worth knowing, if only to see how the words have strayed from their original meanings. *Lord* from A.-S. *hláf*, loaf, and *weard*, keeper, and hence = loaf-keeper. *Lady* from *hláf* and *dægee*, and = loaf-kneader.

Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
(However much he yearn'd to make complete
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon),
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
"Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle;" and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
No sooner gone than suddenly she began:

"To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, 'Lo, the shameless ones, who take
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!'"
Then Lancelot, vexed at having lied in vain:
"Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,

91. **tale**, number. Cf. *Exodus* v. 18. "There shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks." Skeat says, "The original sense was probably order, whence number, orderly arrangement of speech, narrative. **boon**, original meaning is a petition; now means a gift, as well.

93. **Sir**, or *sire*, from L. *senior*, elder. The title of a knight, but often used in addressing a king. **whole**, healed. *Whole, wholesome, heal, hail, health, holy*, are related words, meaning soundness of body or of mind. The initial *w* comparatively recent.

94. **lets**, hinders. Two *let's* in English: *let*, to hinder, from A.-S. *lettan*, to make late; and *let*, to permit, allow, from A.-S. *lætan, letan*. **saddle**, from a root, meaning to sit.

106. **cricket**, the name of an insect that *creaks*, an imitative word, here a collective noun. *Meadow* is but a fuller form of **mead**.

And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has link'd our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the king
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?"

She broke into a little scornful laugh.
"Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord —
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me: only here to-day
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes:
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,

108. **nothing**, because indistinguishable from other voices.

111. **bard**, a Keltic word = A.-S. *gleeman* = F. *minstrel*. The education of the minstrel poet consisted chiefly of the **lays** (lyric poems) committed to memory, or composed by himself to the music of his lyre. These he sang in the halls of the great, at their feasts. Sometimes the bard was a retainer of the chief whom he served; sometimes a wanderer, visiting the courts of princes, and never failing of welcome and of substantial reward.

118. **devoir**, duty; L. *debere*, to owe.

128. **else Rapt**, except in this instance, always engrossed, absorbed.

And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a King who honors his own word,
As if it were his God's?"

"Yea," said the Queen,
"A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,

130. **vows impossible.** No wonder those vows of noble living (see Introduction), with which Arthur bound his knights, were now impossible under a queen with a nature so earthy, and a heart so disloyal to her husband, as to permit her to utter the next five lines.

134. **The low sun makes the color,** the morning and evening sun paints the clouds, and colors even the air. Read Tyndall's essays on light, and learn how. Note the aptness to her condition of this incomplete comparison.

135. **save by the bond** of marriage.

137. **gnat,** mosquito, whose **tiny-trumpeting** is the buzzing of his wings.

141. **pretext,** excuse for staying with the queen.

145. **craft,** skill. She is trying to shift her guilt to the shoulders of her husband.

If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it, therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for, to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself:
They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself: not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till, as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,

147. **wit**, reason.
149. **But knowing**, by simply knowing.
160. **thoroughfare**. The old form of *thorough* was *through*. *Fare* from A.-S. *faran*, to go — the whole = the way through.
161. **green**, grass growing in it because it was rarely trodden.
162. **downs**, a Keltic word meaning hills. The cognate A.-S. word is *tun*, now, *town*.
167. **Fired**, lighted up by the western sun.
168. **horn**, placed so that one seeking admission could announce his presence.

Who let him into lodging, and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvel'd at the wordless man;
And, issuing, found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid,
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not: some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat:
"Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name
Livest between the lips? for, by thy state
And presence, I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
But, since I go to joust, as one unknown,
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not.
Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat, "Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre,
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre

181. **Livest**, etc., art called by.
193. **Blank**, without device or blazon.

"Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
Here laugh'd the father saying, "Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow him: but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before."

"Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight," said young Lavaine,
"For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more: for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt, and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went, and *if* I fought and won it
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves),
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win:
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

199. **Sir Churl**, a reproach to Sir Torre for his ungracious speech — that, since he could not use the shield, Lancelot might.

202. **lustihood**, etc., so full of vigor that he would like to ride.

203. **it**, the diamond.

218. **an if.** An old word for *and*, but used in the sense of *if*, and frequent in Shakespeare. When this force of *an* was forgotten, people placed an *if* after it, as here.

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend;
And you shall win this diamond — as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may;
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."
"A fair, large diamond," added plain Sir Torre,
"Such be for queens and not for simple maids."
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd:
"If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment, then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like."

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes

240. **Not violating,** because Elaine was so fair.

For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half-disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind:
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best,
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answer'd he:
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man
Heard from the baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught, and reft him of his tongue.
"He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled

252. **who was yet,** etc. Lancelot is not a hardened sinner. His better nature is here in revolt against the rule of his lower nature.

259. **doom,** primarily judgment; then judgment adverse to one, and then, as here, the consequence — destruction, death.

263. **smaller time,** less worthy time.

266. **minstrel melody,** see l. 111.

From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill."

"Oh, there, great Lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.
Oh, tell us — for we live apart — you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke
And answer'd him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
Of Celidon the forest; and again
By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
Carved of one emerald, center'd in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse

279. **Badon hill.** See Introduction for these battles.

280. **rapt,** caught up, fascinated. L. *rapere,* to seize.

293. **Lady's Head,** the head of the Virgin Mary. **Cuirass,** from F. *cuir,* L. *corium,* leather, the material out of which the breastplate was originally made.

294. **center'd,** the emerald was in the center of a pictured sun.

295. **lighten'd,** etc., gleamed, as the rise and fall of his breast in breathing changed the emerald's position.

297. **White Horse.** The White Horse was the standard or national emblem of the Danish chief. In Berkshire is the

Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; "And on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legions crying Christ and him,
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood.
And, seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
'They are broken, they are broken,' for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —
For, if his own knight cast him down, he laughs,
Saying his knights are better men than he —
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
No greater leader."

While he utter'd this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
"Save your great self, fair lord;" and, when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry —
Being mirthful he but in a stately kind, —
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud

famous White Horse Hill. Twice in *Guinevere* the heathen are called "Lords of the White Horse."

305. **break them,** put the heathen to flight.

309. **for the King** is here pleonastic, has no connection with what follows.

Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever, in her hovering to and fro,
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived.
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and color of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
First as in fear, step after step, she stole
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:

325. **to make him cheer,** to entertain him. **cheer,** F. *chere*, L. *cara*, face, look. Be of good cheer = be of happy countenance, look pleased.

329. **lived,** appearing in her dreams, and recalled in her waking hours.

338. **rathe,** early. Our comparative *rather* (*rathe* and *rathest* have perished, and the initial *h* is lost) once expressed a pure time relation. Earle instances a threatening letter written, in 1420, by Sir Hugh Luttrell, in which he says he "shall come home, and that *rather* [earlier] than some men wolde" wish to see him. *Rather*, expressing preference, even now really denotes time. I would rather go than stay = I would sooner go than stay = I would take the going sooner than I would take the staying. **half-cheated,** half-deluding herself with, and half-deluded by, the thought that she wanted to bid Lavaine, and not Lancelot, farewell. A fine touch of nature in Tennyson.

Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
"This shield, my friend, where is it?" and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dreamed she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
"Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest — will you wear
My favor at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
"Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who know me know."
"Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine

347. **flattering**, an instance of Tennyson's delicate use of words. It is from a base *flak*, meaning to stroke, to pet.

349. **set upon him**, in attack, in the tournament.

350. **dewy light**, the air yet charged with the moisture of the dew.

356. **favor**, something worn as a token of regard. What it indicated when worn by a knight is seen farther on in the poem.

363. **wont, custom, habit**, A.-S. *wunian* to dwell, to continue in.

Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, "True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?" and she told him, "A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls," and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, "I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living," and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine,
Returning, brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine;
"Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come." "A grace to me,"
She answer'd, "twice to-day. I am your Squire."
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, "Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your color back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:"
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away; she stay'd a minute,
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —

365. **lesser likelihood**, less probability — *lesser*, a double comparative, still used. A keen argument, as he acknowledges. He wished to fight unknown; and wearing a favor, contrary to his custom, would help to disguise him.

382. **Squire**, a young noble before he attained the dignity of knighthood, here a shield-bearer. Knights were thus attended

Her bright hair blown about the serious face
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss —
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd, and pray'd,
And, ever laboring, had scoop'd himself,
In the white rock, a chapel and a hall
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And, thither wending, there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:

397. **companions.** The etymology of the word gives its best meaning — L. *cum*, together, and *panis*, bread — those eating bread together.

409. **made a noise.** The rustling leaves made the noise of showers.

411. **broke from underground**, sun rose above the horizon.

413. **mass**, from L. *missa*, *mittere*, in the command given by the priest to those who were not yet allowed to remain during

Then Lancelot, saying, "Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?"
And after muttering, "The great Lancelot,"
At last he got his breath and answer'd, "One,
One have I seen — that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there — then, were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen."

So spake Lavaine, and, when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery, which half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung.
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found

the celebration of the Eucharist. *Ite, missa est*, Go, the congregation is dismissed. Then it came to name the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, itself. Used as a termination in *Christmas, Candlemas*, etc.

422. **Pendragon**, see Introduction.

426. **lists**, the ground inclosed for the combats.

431. **samite**, a rich silk cloth.

The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.
Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,
"Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth,
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw

441 **canopy**, from a Gr. word meaning a mosquito. Applied to the bed furnished with overhangings to protect the sleeper against the insect; then to whatever overarched one, now even to the sky.

442. **nameless king**, see l. 40.

446. **crescent**, growing. The good in Lancelot here shows itself.

450. **gaped**, looked open-mouthed.

451. **anon**, A.-S. *on an*, in one, in one moment.

456. **Shock**, came together, collided — an unusual meaning of the verb.

457. This line is parenthetic. If there was any one left on horseback to perceive. The objects of *perceive* are in the next line.

459. **bode**, waited.

Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron — whom he smote he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone —
The grace and versatility of the man.
Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know."
"How then? who then?" a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds and thus,
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
And him that helms it, so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear,
Down-glancing, lamed the charger, and a spear,

482. **smoke**, the tops of the waves are caught up by the wind and tossed about in spray.

484. **helms**, steers the bark, or boat.

Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side and there snapt and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
But thought to do while he might yet endure,
And, being lustily holpen by the rest,
His party, — tho' it seemed half-miracle
To those he fought with — drave his kith and kin,
And all the Table Round that held the lists,
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
Proclaiming his the prize who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried, "Advance, and take thy prize,
The diamond;" but he answer'd, "Diamond me
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and, I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head:"
"Ah, my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,
"I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."
But he, "I die already with it: draw —

489. **worshipfully**, short form of *worthshipfully*, worthily, honorably.

502. **Diamond me.** The noun used as a verb, as *prize* in l. 504.

511. **me is pleonastic — poetic use.**

Draw," — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week,
Hid from the wide world's rumor by the grove
Of poplars, with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
"Lo, Sire, our knight thro' whom we won the day
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
Untaken, crying that his prize is death."
"Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one,
So great a knight as we have seen to-day —
He seemed to me another Lancelot,
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot —
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.

525. **marches**, A.-S. *mearc*, a boundary, or border, of the land allotted to the families of the same blood. *Mark* came to be applied to the land within the boundary. This division of land, separating those akin from strangers, was brought by the Anglo-Saxons into England. The coalescence of marks made shires.

530. **that such an one — should die.** He is so agitated as to forget to finish the sentence.

And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honor: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond and deliver it and return
And bring us where he is and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until you find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took,
And gave, the diamond: then, from where he sat,
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the king's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking, "Is it Lancelot who has come,
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain

545. **bring us** back word.
552. **mid might**, in the full vigor of his youth.
556. **Sir Modred**, a nephew of the King and a traitor to him.

Of glory, and has added wound to wound,
And ridd'n away to die?" So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then, when he saw the Queen, embracing, ask'd,
"Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said.
"And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen, amazed,
"Was he not with you? won he not your prize?"
"Nay, but one like him." "Why that like was he."
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd: and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd:
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain of purer glory.'"

Then replied the King,
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted you.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,

567. **tarriance**, stay.

So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
But little cause for laughter: his own kin —
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this! —
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
So that he went sore wounded from the field:
Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,
"Thy hopes are mine," and, saying that, she choked,
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shriek'd out "Traitor" to the unhearing wall,
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat.
Whom, glittering in enamel'd arms, the maid
Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot,
lord?
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won."

606. **bit the palm**, nails cut into it. Jealousy the cause.
612. **poplar grove**, where Lancelot was with the hermit.

"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side," whereat she caught her breath;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
Thereon she smote her hand: well-nigh she swoon'd;
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridden a random round
To seek him, and was wearied of the search.
To whom the lord of Astolat, "Bide with us,
And ride no more at random, noble Prince!
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;
This will he send or come for: furthermore
Our son is with him: we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear." To this the courteous Prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,—
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it.
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape,—
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
"Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence,
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, "Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,

Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight
your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds?" "Nay, by mine head," said he,
"I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes:
But, an ye will it, let me see the shield."
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd;
"Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true
man!"
"And right was I," she answer'd merrily. "I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of
all."
"And if *I* dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, you know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?"
Full simple was her answer, "What know I?

651. **falcon**, pronounced *fawk'n*, the name of a bird of strong beak and claws, trained to hunt other birds and even foxes and hares. Falconry came into Europe, from the East, very early, and was for centuries a great amusement of kings and nobles. It has now disappeared from Europe. The sportsman rode with the falcon resting on his wrist. When game was discovered, the hood was taken from the head of the falcon; and, rising high above his destined prey, the bird swooped down upon it, seized it, and bore it away to the sportsman.

653. **To all the winds**, in every direction.

659. **Ramp**, rampant, standing upright on his hind legs, **in the field**, or blank surface, of the shield; but not in the posture of springing, which would be salient.

My brethren have been all my fellowship,
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—
I know not if I know what true love is,
But, if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love."
"Yea, by God's death," said he, "ye love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves." "So be it," cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away:
But he pursued her, calling, "Stay a little!
One golden minute's grace: he wore your sleeve:
Would he break faith with one I may not name?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
Nay — like enow: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
For, if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
And, if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand; and, whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times! — a thousand times farewell!
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two

670. **Meseem'd**, it seemed to me, = the past tense of *methinks*. This is from A.-S. *thyncan*, to appear, not *thencan*, to think. The *me* is dative object.

680. **may not name**, the Queen. How unconscious is Elaine of Gawain's charms or even of his meaning! She is the one foil of all the chief characters of the poem except Arthur.

May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,
So you will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other."

Then he gave,
And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and, all wearied of the quest,
Leapt on his horse, and, carolling as he went,
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King
What the King knew, "Sir Lancelot is the knight."
And added, "Sir, my liege, so much I learnt;
But fail'd to find him tho' I rode all round
The region: but I lighted on the maid
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond: she will render it;
For, by mine head, she knows his hiding-place."

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,
"Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,

693. **May meet,** if Lancelot brings her as his bride to court.

702. **liege,** first applied, Skeat says, as here, to the lord and not to the vassal. Means free; and liege lord = lord of a free band, privileged men.

714. **twenty strokes of the blood,** twenty beats of the pulse, fifteen seconds or so.

Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed;
"The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat."
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be; but most
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale, like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine days' wonder flared:
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen;
And, pledging Lancelot and the lily maid,
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor

718. **ears were prick'd.** An equine figure. The horse pricks his ears, thrusts them toward the sound it hears or the startling sight it sees.

723. **Predoom'd,** prejudged. The people are here illustrating the tendency to judge harshly, rather than kindly, of one — the tendency which has caused the degeneracy of the word — *doom*, meaning at first only judgment, decision.

727. Note the point to this line.

729. **nine days' wonder.** A wonder was popularly supposed to last nine days. Cf. "I was seven of the nine days out of the wonder before you came," in *As You Like It*.

734. **felt the knot,** felt herself choking with the passion of jealousy as they pledged, — drank to Lancelot and Elaine.

Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
"Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
Sweet father, will you let me loose my wits?"
"Nay," said he, "surely!" "Wherefore, let me hence,"
She answer'd, "and find out our dear Lavaine."
"Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine;
Bide," answer'd he: "we needs must hear anon
Of him and of that other." "Ay," she said,
"And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,

738. **wormwood** has no connection with *worm* or with *wood*. It is from A.-S. *wermód*, ware-mood, mind-preserver; and points, says Skeat, to the supposed curative properties of the plant in mental affections. The bitterness of the plant is that to which Tennyson here refers.

When these have worn their tokens; let me hence
I pray you." Then her father, nodding, said,
"Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest; yea, and you must give it —
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a Queen's —
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful, you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away;
And, while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
"Being so very wilful you must go,"
And changed itself, and echoed in her heart,
"Being so very wilful you must die."
But she was happy enough, and shook it off
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
"What matter, so I help him back to life?"
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide,
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and, before the city-gates,
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers:
Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried,
"Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He, amazed,

768. **this fruit, etc.** He is above your level. Cf. Laertes' talk to Ophelia concerning Hamlet.

786. **roan,** a mixed color, white and red blended.

"Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and, being in his moods,
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwell at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more, perchance, to tourney in it.
And, when they gained the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Uttered a little, tender, dolorous cry.
The sound, not wonted in a place so still,
Woke the sick knight; and, while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
"Your prize, the diamond sent you by the King:"
His eyes glisten'd: she fancied, "Is it for me?"
And, when the maid had told him all the tale

797. **far blood**, those distantly related.
799. **casque**, helm or helmet, a covering for the head in battle
812. **The sound**, to which the still place was unaccustomed.
814. **blank**, no intelligence yet in them.

Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and, as we kiss the child
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
"Alas," he said, "your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have." "No rest for me," she said;
"Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest."
What might she mean by that? his large, black eyes,
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colors on her simple face;
And Lancelot look'd, and was perplext in mind,
And, being weak in body, said no more;
But did not love the color; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd,
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim, rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro' the dim, rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
In either twilight, ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him.

829. **larger thro'**, seemingly larger, as his face had shrunk away.

843. **either**, morning and evening.

And likewise many a night: and Lancelot
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming, and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest, and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And, peradventure, had he seen her first,
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

856. **simples**, medicinal herbs. Webster says, "So called because each vegetable is supposed to possess its particular virtue and therefore to constitute a *simple* remedy."

864. **had died**, would have died.

869. **straiten'd**, confined, prevented him.

871. **And faith, etc.** His love for the Queen, cherished in dis-

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live:
For, when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then, if the maiden, while that ghostly grace
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain: it cannot be,
He will not love me: how then? must I die?"
Then as a little, helpless, innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night, repeating, "Must I die?"
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;

regard of his and her relations to the King, kept him true to her, but false to his lord.

874. **could not live.** The feebleness of vows to live better, made in sickness and under fear of death, is a common theme of writers.

879. **ghostly grace,** the grace of the Queen seen by him vaguely and in memory.

884. **ere her time,** before the evening twilight.

And "Him or death" she mutter'd, "Death or
him,"
Again and like a burthen, "Him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three.
There, morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought,
"If I be loved, these are my festal robes;
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall."
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers; "And do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me that I make
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can."
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I must go to-day:" then out she brake,
"Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word."
"Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."

897. **burthen**, like the refrain of a song, the part often repeated.
911. **can do.**
922. **that I am alive to hear is due to your nursing care.**

Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you: let me die."
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And, innocently extending her white arms,
"Your love," she said, "your love — to be your wife."
And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chos'n to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:
But now there never will be wife of mine."
"No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."
And Lancelot answer'd, "Nay, the world, the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation — nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness." And she said,
"Not to be with you, not to see your face —
Alas for me, then, my good days are done."
"Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay!
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea I know it of mine own self:
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,

937. **blare**, roar; used generally of trumpets. The root the same as that of *blazon*.

938. **quit**, to repay, to be discharged of; L. *quietus*, free, satisfied.

946. **your flower of life**, yourself in your prime.

More specially, should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory,
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy; furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied,
"Of all this will I nothing;" and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father. "Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are you, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,
"That were against me: what I can I will;"
And there that day remain'd, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;

953. **So that**, if that.
955. **In all your quarrels.** The knights of chivalry rode about, avenging wrongs, especially of the gentler sex.
962. **Then spake he.**
968. **That were against me**, I cannot do it.

Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping, flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
"Have comfort," whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren, saying, "Peace to thee,
Sweet sister," whom she answered with all calm.
But, when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls'
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song "The song of Love and Death."
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

983. What figure in **labor** ?

994. **sallow-rifted glooms, the glooms of evening streaked with pale yellow.**

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death, who puts an end to pain;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die."

High with the last line scaled her voice; and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind,
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, "Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death," and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die!"

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well

1002. **death** must be bitter. The little song overflows with pathos.
1011. **scaled**, ran up the scale, rose in pitch.
1012. **fiery dawning**, early, the clouds still of a fiery red.
1014. **Phantom**, etc. A superstitious belief.

Becomes a wonder and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face and thought,
"Is this Elaine?" till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, "Sweet brothers, yester night
I seem'd a curious, little, maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only, ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the king.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will:'
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the king.
There will I enter in among them all,
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went nor bade me one:

1027. I seem'd to be.
1040. the wish to go beyond the poplar, up to the palace of the King.

And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!"

"Peace," said her father, "O my child, ye seem
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?"

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
And bluster into stormy sobs, and say,
"I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down.
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house."

To which the gentle sister made reply,
"Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me, than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest."
"Highest?" the father answer'd, echoing "highest?"
(He meant to break the passion in her) "nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame.
If this be high, what is it to be low?"

1060. an I. See l. 218.

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat,
"Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders: never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For, if I could believe the things you say,
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,
Besought Lavaine to write, as she devised,
A letter, word for word; and, when he ask'd,
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;" she replied,
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote

1080. This poem, like all of Tennyson's, is gemmed with epigrammatic lines, full of wisdom.

1083. **pass**, go on, die. We call the funeral-bell the *passing*-bell. The last poem of the *Idylls of the King* is the *Passing of Arthur*.

1091. **ghostly man**, the priest. *Ghostly* (the *h* inserted) from A.-S. *geist*, the spirit, or soul.

1092. **shrive me**, hear my confession, and absolve me from all sin.

The letter she devised; which, being writ
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not," she said —"ye never yet
Denied my fancies — this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb, old man alone
Go with me; he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

1111. **For richness**, in point of richness.
1113. **chariot-bier**, a wheeled vehicle on which a dead body is borne.
1128. **dole**, grief.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly, with bent brows,
Accompanying the sad chariot-bier,
Past like a shadow through the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
"Sister, farewell for ever," and again,
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead
But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,

1130. **bent brows**, heads bent in sorrow.
1133. **Full-summer**, in the light of midsummer.
1134. **Pall'd**, draped.

Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,—
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he well nigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot, kneeling, utter'd, "Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:

1167. **vibrate.** She might have seemed a statue, but, by the vibration of the shadow of the lace, the courtier knew she was trembling with emotion.

1169. **oriel,** a windowed recess in a room. Any small room more private and better adorned than the rest of the house. **summer side,** sunny-side.

1175. **armlet,** literally a small arm, and then an ornament for the arm.

1177. **tawnier.** *Tawny* is another spelling for *tanny*, brown, sunburnt. The passage seems to mean that the necklace into which she was to make the diamonds would be as much browner than her neck as the mother swan's neck is browner than her young swan's, the cygnet's.

Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance we both can pardon; but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying through your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust
To make up that defect: let rumors be:
When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied:

"It may be I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me. Lancelot of the Lake,
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts

1180. **Words**, etc., allow me to put my feeling into words, as we allow one in grief to cry.

1182. **rumors flying**, that her regard for him was waning. He argues that he and she were not bound together by the marriage tie; and that to compensate for this lack, they should *voluntarily* trust each other more completely.

I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
Diamonds for me? they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
For her! for your new fancy. Only this
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.
I doubt not that, however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
In which, as Arthur's queen, I move and rule:
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!
A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
Deck her with these; tell her she shines me down:
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O as much fairer as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds! hers, not mine —
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —
She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized,
And, through the casement, standing wide for heat,

1203. **acknowledge nobler.** We are grateful that this confession is extorted from her. Read *Guinevere* to see how sinful she afterwards became, and then how sincerely penitent.

1205. **your own** worth.

1206. Another golden line.

1214. **cannot speak,** etc., as queen I cannot reprove you if you and Elaine exhibit your love before me, so have your joys apart from me — elsewhere.

1222. The woman's heart here speaks.

1225. **standing wide,** open on account of the heat.

Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream!
Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then, while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd,
"What is it?" But that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,
"He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,
Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
Or come to take the King to fairy land?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into fairy land."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man

1234. **like a star**, etc., the body in white relieved upon the pall of the samite.

From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul, thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read,
And, ever in the reading, lords and dames
Wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips
Who had devised the letter moved again.

1253. **to the full eye**, turning from a side view to look the King full in the eye.
1264. **sometime**, formerly.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all;
"My lord, liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:
To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her, and I bade her no farewell.
Though, had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen,
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
"Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death."
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding, "Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me through the world, she ask'd;

1288. **not.** The second negative here strengthens the first.
1298. **Sea was her wrath,** her wrath raged like the sea after a storm.

It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her. Then would I,
More specially were he she wedded poor,
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance; more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, "O my knight,
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully."

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshall'd order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.
And, when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, "Let her tomb
Be costly; and her image thereupon.
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought

1315. worship, honor. See l. 491.

Thereafter; but, when now the lords and dames
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd, in passing, "Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said:

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most love and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watched thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honor and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man,
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

1345. affiance, trust.

Then answer'd Lancelot, "Fair she was, my King,
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the King.
"Let love be free; free love is for the best:
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
She fail'd to bind, though being, as I think,
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
And, at the inrunning of a little brook,
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
And saw the barge that brought her, moving down,
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
Low in himself, "Ah! simple heart and sweet,
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last —
Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?

1370. **after heaven**, next to heaven.
1380. **a blot**, a speck.
1384. **now at last**, he had not bidden her farewell on leaving Astolat.

Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one
Who passes thro' the vision of the night —
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters; eve and morn
She kiss'd me saying, 'Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son,' and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!
For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
Who knows? but, if I would not, then may God,

1387. **jealousy in love** did the Queen call her feeling? Is it not rather **jealous pride**, which comes only when love is dead?

1388. **crescent**, growing.

1389. **waxes**, grows — obsolescent.

1399. **mere**, sea; L. *mare*. Kept in our *mer*maid, meremaid, and in *mer*man.

I pray Him, send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep into that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

THE HOLY GRAIL

TENNYSON'S Holy Grail is based on a conception that has found expression under similar titles since A.D. 1100, when it first appeared in verse.

The Holy Grail, according to some legends of the middle ages, was the cup used by our Saviour in dispensing the wine at the last supper; and according to others, the platter on which the paschal lamb was served at the last Passover observed by our Lord. By some it was said to have been preserved by Joseph of Arimathea, who received into it the blood which flowed from the Redeemer's wounds as He hung on the cross. By others it was said to have been brought down from heaven by the angels, and committed to the charge of knights, who guarded it on the top of a lofty mountain. It is believed by some that where the body or the blood of Christ is, there are His soul and His divinity. That the Grail — such being its contents — should be marvelous, divine, mysterious, was but logical and natural. This cup, according to the legend, if approached by any but a perfectly pure and holy person, would be borne away and vanish from sight. The quest of the Grail was "the commencement of all bold enterprise, the occasion of all prowess and heroic deeds, the investigation of all the sciences, the demonstration of great wonders, the end of all bounty and goodness, the marvel of all marvels."

M. Paulin Paris, who has been engaged for nearly forty years in the study of Arthurian romance, is of the opinion, that the legend conception came from some Welsh monk or hermit who lived early in the eighth century; that its guiding and essential purpose was an assertion for the British Church of an independent derivation of its Christianity

direct from Palestine, and not through Rome; that the conception was embodied in a book called *Liber Gradalis*, or *De Gradali;* that this book was kept for more than three hundred years from a fear lest it should bring them into collision with the hierarchy and make their orthodoxy suspected; that it came to be known and read in the second half of the twelfth century; that a French poet, Robert de Boron, who probably had not seen the book, but received information regarding it, was the first to embody the conception in a vernacular literary form by writing his poem of *Joseph d'Arimathie*, and that, after Boron, Walter Map, and others came into the field. It is maintained by English writers generally that the conception arose certainly on British ground, but in the twelfth century, not in the eighth; that it was introduced by some master-hand, probably that of Walter Map, into every branch of Arthurian romance; and that if Map was not one author of the conception, as seems highly probable, he first invested it in literary form.

Accepting the general testimony of the MSS., and assuming without further proof that Map composed the original book of the *Saint Graal*, the genesis of the work seems not difficult to trace.

In early life, Map was a canon of Salisbury; either afterwards or at the same time he was parish priest of Westbury near Bristol. Gloucestershire and Wiltshire are both neighboring counties to Somersetshire, in which Glastonbury was the most sacred and celebrated spot. Visiting that ancient abbey, Map would have become acquainted with the legend of Joseph of Arimathea in all its details; and he would have seen the altar said to have been transported by angels from Palestine, and which, long hidden from mortal sight on account of the wickedness of the times, had lately been revealed and reinstated. His versatile and capacious mind would as a matter of course have been familiar with the whole Arthur legend as it then (1170–1180) existed, if for no other reason because he lived in the very part of England which was studded with Arthurian sites. He fully answers to the description of the "great clerks" who, according to Robert de Boron, first made and told the history of the Grail.

The spread and ascendency to which the Grail conception rapidly attained in all Christian countries made the creations of Arthurian romance the delight of all cultivated minds. From England, which we regard as the land of its origin, the Grail legend at once passed to France, where is given in metrical dress the legend of Percival, one of the knights of the Round Table, under the transformation which the Grail conception had effected. Flemish, Icelandic, and Welsh reproductions of the Grail romances have been found to exist. One of the first employments of the printing press in England, France, and Germany was to multiply poems or romances embodying this legend. Hence Caxton printed for Sir Thomas Malory (1485) *The History of King Arthur and his Noble Knights*, a work that has formed the basis of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, one of which is *The Holy Grail*.

From noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,
Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure,
Had passed into the silent life of prayer,
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl
The helmet in an abbey far away
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.

And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,
And honored him, and wrought into his heart
A way by love that wakened love within,

2. **Sir Percivale**, the third son of Pellinore, king of Wales. He caught sight of the Holy Grail after his combat with Lancelot's brother, Ector de Maris, and both were healed by it. Sir Percivale was with Sir Bors and Sir Galahad when the visible Saviour went into the consecrated wafer given them by the bishop. This is called the achievement of the quest of the Holy Grail.

To answer that which came: and as they sat
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
That puffed the swaying branches into smoke
Above them, ere the summer when he died,
The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale:

"O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years:
For never have I known the world without,
Nor ever strayed beyond the pale: but thee,
When first thou camest — such a courtesy
Spake through the limbs and in the voice — I knew
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamped with the image of the King; and now
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
My brother? was it earthly passion crost?"

"Nay," said the knight; "for no such passion mine,
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
Among us in the jousts, while women watch
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength
Within us, better offered up to Heaven."

To whom the monk: "The Holy Grail! — I trust
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much

37. To whom the monk said or responded.

We moulder — as to things without I mean —
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,
Told us of this in our refectory,
But spake with such a sadness and so low
We heard not half of what he said. What is it?
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?"

"Nay, monk! what phantom?" answered Percivale.
"The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
This, from the blessed land of Aromat —
After the day of darkness, when the dead
Went wandering o'er Moriah — the good saint,
Arimathean Joseph, journeying brought
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
And there awhile it bode; and if a man
Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times

41. **refectory**, the eating-room of a monastery.

47. **with his own**, *disciples* understood.

48. **Aromat**, poetic name of Palestine, because of the abundance of spices from that region.

49. **day of darkness**, referring to the crucifixion and the dead coming from their graves. (*Matthew* xxvii. 52.)

50. **Moriah**, the hill on which the temple of Jerusalem was built.

51. **Arimathean Joseph**, in whose tomb the body of Jesus was laid. (*Matthew* xxvii. 57.)

52. **Glastonbury**. The legend is that Joseph of Arimathea stuck his staff into the ground in the "sacred isle of Glastonbury," and that this thorn blossoms on Christmas Day every year. St. Joseph and King Arthur were both buried at Glastonbury.

Grew to such evil that the holy cup
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared."

To whom the monk: "From our old books I know
That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,
And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;
And there he built with wattles from the marsh
A little lonely church in days of yore,
For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.
But who first saw the holy thing to-day?"

"A woman," answered Percivale, "a nun,
And one no further off in blood from me
Than sister; and if ever holy maid
With knees of adoration wore the stone,
A holy maid; though never maiden glowed,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love,
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,
Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,
Across the iron grating of her cell
Beat, and she prayed and fasted all the more.

"And he to whom she told her sins, or what
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,

60. **That Joseph came.** See introductory note.

A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,
A legend handed down through five or six,
And each of these a hundred winters old,
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made
His Table Round, and all men's hearts became
Clean for a season, surely he had thought
That now the Holy Grail would come again;
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,
And heal the world of all their wickedness!
'O Father!' asked the maiden, 'might it come
To me by prayer and fasting?' 'Nay,' said he,
'I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow.'
And so she prayed and fasted, till the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, through her, and I thought
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

"For on a day she sent to speak with me.
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
Beautiful in the light of holiness.
And 'O my brother Percivale,' she said,
'Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
Blown, and I thought, "It is not Arthur's use
To hunt by moonlight;" and the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew
Coming upon me — O never harp nor horn,
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came; and then,

Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam,
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
With rosy colors leaping on the wall;
And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night.
So now the Holy Thing is here again
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,
That so perchance the vision may be seen
By thee and those, and all the world be healed.'

"Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this
To all men; and myself fasted and prayed
Always, and many among us many a week
Fasted and prayed even to the uttermost,
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

"And one there was among us, ever moved
Among us in white armor, Galahad.

135. **Galahad.** Queen Guinevere says that Sir Lancelot "came of the eighth degree from our Saviour, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth, . . . and therefore be they the greatest gentlemen of all the world."

Sir Galahad was the only knight who could sit in the "Siege Perilous," a seat at the Round Table reserved for the knight destined to achieve the quest of the Holy Grail; and no other person could sit in it without peril to his life. His great achievement was that of the Holy Grail. It is quite certain that the Arthurian legends mean that Sir Galahad saw with his bodily eyes and touched with his hands "the incarnate Saviour" reproduced by the consecration of the elements of bread and wine. Others see it by the eye of faith only, but Sir Galahad saw it

'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,
Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight; and none
In so young youth was ever made a knight
Till Galahad; and this Galahad, when he heard
My sister's vision, filled me with amaze;
His eyes became so like her own, they seemed
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

"Sister or brother none had he; but some
Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said
Begotten by enchantment — chatterers they,
Like birds of passage piping up and down,
That gape for flies — we know not whence they come;
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?

"But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet;
And out of this she plaited broad and long
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam;
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,
Saying, 'My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.

bodily with his eyes. His shield was that of Joseph of Arimathea. It was a snow-white shield on which Joseph made a cross with his blood. After divers adventures Galahad came to Sarras, where he was made king, was shown the Holy Grail by Joseph, and even "took the Lord's body between his hands" and died. Then suddenly "a great multitude of angles bear his soul up to heaven," since when no man could say he had seen the Holy Grail.

Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break through all, till one will crown thee king
Far in the spiritual city:' and as she spake
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes
Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her belief.

"Then came a year of miracle: O brother,
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,
Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away,
And carven with strange figures; and in and out
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.
And Merlin called it 'The Siege Perilous,'
Perilous for good and ill; 'for there,' he said,
'No man could sit but he should lose himself:'
And once by misadvertence Merlin sat
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
Cried, 'If I lose myself I save myself!'

"Then on a summer night it came to pass,
While the great banquet lay along the hall,
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

"And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,

168. **Fashioned by Merlin.** He is said also to have brought from Ireland the stones of Stonehenge on Salisbury plain, where they commemorate Aurelius Ambrosius' victory over Vortigern.

178. See line 456.

182. **And all at once.** "Then anon they heard cracking and

And rending, and a blast, and overhead
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
And in the blast there smote along the hall
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
All over covered with a luminous cloud,
And none might see who bare it, and it past.
But every knight beheld his fellow's face
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,

crying of thunder. In the midst of the blast entered a sunbeam more clear by seven times than the day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none that could see it, nor who bare it, but the whole hall was full filled with good odors, and every knight had such meat and drink as he best loved in the world, and when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed suddenly, and they wist not where it became.

"Then looked they and saw a man come out of the holy vessel, that had all the signs of the passion of Christ, and he said: 'This is the holy dish wherein I ate the lamb on Sher-Thursday, and now hast thou seen it; . . . yet hast thou not seen it so openly as thou shalt see it in the city of Sarras; therefore thou must go hence and bear with thee this holy vessel, for this night it shall depart from the realm of Logris. . . . And take with thee . . . Sir Percivale and Sir Bors.'

"So departed Sir Galahad, and Sir Percivale and Sir Bors with him. And so they rode three days, and came to a river, and found a ship; . . . and when on board they found in the midst the table of silver and the Sancgreall covered with red samite. Then Sir Galahad laid him down and slept; . . . and when he woke . . . he saw the city of Sarras. . . . At the year's end . . . he saw before him the holy vessel, and a man kneeling upon his knees in the likeness of the bishop, which had about him a great fellowship of angels, as it had been Christ Himself. . . . And when he came to the sakering of the Mass, and had done, anon he called Sir Galahad, and said unto him, 'Come forth, . . . and thou shalt see that which thou hast much desired to see.' . . . And he beheld spiritual things . . ."—*Malory.*

And staring each at other like dumb men
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

"I sware a vow before them all, that I,
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,
Until I found and saw it, as the nun
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest."

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,
"What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?"
"Nay, for my lord," said Percivale, "the King,
Was not in hall: for early that same day,
Scaped through a cavern from a bandit hold,
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall
Crying on help: for all her shining hair
Was smeared with earth, and either milky arm
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn
In tempest: so the King arose and went
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit
Some little of this marvel he too saw
Returning o'er the plain that then began
To darken under Camelot; whence the King
Looked up, calling aloud 'Lo, there! the roofs
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt.'
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,

As having there so oft with all his knights
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

"O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall.
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.
And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
At sunrise till the people in far fields,
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,
Behold it, crying, 'We have still a King.'

"And, brother, had you known our hall within,
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,
And all the light that falls upon the board
Streams through the twelve great battles of our King.
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,

Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,
Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.
And also one to the west, and counter to it,
And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how?—
O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

"So to this hall full quickly rode the King,
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.
And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw
The golded dragon sparkling over all:
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms
Hacked, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and seared
Followed, and in among bright faces, ours,
Full of the vision, prest: and then the King
Spake to me, being nearest, 'Percivale'
(Because the hall was all in tumult — some
Vowing, and some protesting), 'what is this?'

"O brother, when I told him what had chanced,
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face
Darkened, as I have seen it more than once,
When some brave deed seemed to be done in vain,
Darken; and 'Woe is me, my knights,' he cried,
'Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.'
Bold was mine answer, 'Had thyself been here,

My King, thou wouldst have sworn.' 'Yea, yea,'
said he.
'Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?'

"'Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,
But since I did not see the Holy Thing,
I sware a vow to follow it till I saw.'

"Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if
any
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:
'Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows.'

"'Lo, now,' said Arthur, 'have ye seen a cloud?
What go ye into the wilderness to see?'

"Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called,
'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—
"O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me."'

"'Ah, Galahad, Galahad,' said the King, 'for
such
As thou art is the vision, not for these.
Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign—
Holier is none, my Percivale, than she—
A sign to maim this Order which I made.
But ye, that follow but the leader's bell'
(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)
'Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,

300. **Taliessin,** son of St. Henwig, chief of the bards of the West, in the time of King Arthur.

And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.
Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne
Five knights at once, and every younger knight,
Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,
Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye,
What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales'
(For thus it pleased the King to range me close
After Sir Galahad); 'nay,' said he, 'but men
With strength and will to right the wronged, of power
To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,
Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood—
But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm
Pass through this hall—how often, O my knights,
Your places being vacant at my side,
This chance of noble deeds will come and go
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,
Return no more: ye think I show myself
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet
The morrow morn once more in one full field
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
Rejoicing in that Order which he made.'

315. **cries, cries for help.**

"So when the sun broke next from under ground,
All the great table of our Arthur closed
And clashed in such a tourney and so full,
So many lances broken—never yet
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came:
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength
Was in us from the vision, overthrew
So many knights that all the people cried,
And almost burst the barriers in their heat,
Shouting, 'Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!'

"But when the next day brake from under ground—
O brother, had you known our Camelot,
Built by old kings, age after age, so old
The King himself had fears that it would fall,
So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs
Tottered toward each other in the sky,
Met foreheads all along the street of those
Who watched us pass, and lower, and where the long
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers
Fell as we past; and men and boys astride
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,
At all the corners, named us each by name,
Calling 'God speed!' but in the ways below

328. **sun broke next from under ground.** See *Lancelot and Elaine*, l. 413.

350. **On wyvern, a wyvern was a sort of flying serpent.**

The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,
Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud,
'This madness has come on us for our sins.'
So to the Gate of the three Queens we came,
Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically,
And thence departed every one his way.

"And I was lifted up in heart, and thought
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
So many and famous names; and never yet
Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

"Thereafter, the dark warning of our King
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.
Then every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
And I was thirsty even unto death;
And I, too, cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'

"And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook

With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white
Played ever back upon the sloping wave,
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook
Fallen, and on the lawns. 'I will rest here,'
I said, 'I am not worthy of the Quest;'
But even while I drank the brook, and ate
The goodly apples, all these things at once
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

"And then behold a woman at a door
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,
And all her bearing gracious; and she rose
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,
'Rest here;' but when I touched her, lo! she, too,
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house
Became no better than a broken shed,
And in it a dead babe; and also this
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

"And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.
Then flashed a yellow gleam across the world,
And where it smote the ploughshare in the field,
The ploughman left his ploughing, and fell down
Before it; where it glittered on her pail,
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought
'The sun is rising,' though the sun had risen.
Then was I ware of one that on me moved
In golden armor with a crown of gold

About a casque all jewels; and his horse
In golden armor jewelled everywhere:
And on the splendor came, flashing me blind;
And seemed to me the Lord of all the world,
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,
Opened his arms to embrace me as he came,
And up I went and touched him, and he, too,
Fell into dust, and I was left alone
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

"And I rode on and found a mighty hill,
And on the top, a city walled: the spires
Pricked with incredible pinnacles into heaven.
And by the gateway stirred a crowd; and these
Cried to me climbing, 'Welcome, Percivale!
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!'
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past,
Far through a ruinous city, and I saw
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found
Only one man of an exceeding age.
'Where is that goodly company,' said I,
'That so cried out upon me?' and he had
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasped,
'Whence and what art thou?' and even as he spoke
Fell into dust, and disappeared, and I
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,
'Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
And touch it, it will crumble into dust.'

"And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby
A holy hermit in a hermitage,
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:

"'O son, thou hast not true humility,
The highest virtue, mother of them all;
For when the Lord of all things made Himself
Naked of glory for His mortal change,
"Take thou my robe," she said, "for all is thine,"
And all her form shone forth with sudden light
So that the angels were amazed, and she
Followed Him down, and like a flying star
Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east;
But her thou hast not known: for what is this
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself
As Galahad.' When the hermit made an end,
In silver armor suddenly Galahad shone
Before us, and against the chapel door
Laid lance, and entered, and we knelt in prayer.
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,
And at the sacring of the mass I saw
The holy elements alone; but he,
'Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:
I saw the fiery face as of a child
That smote itself into the bread, and went;
And hither am I come; and never yet

463. **The holy elements**, the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
This Holy Thing, failed from my side, nor come
Covered, but moving with me night and day,
Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain-top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
And past through Pagan realms, and made them mine,
And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down
And broke through all, and in the strength of this
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,
And hence I go; and one will crown me king
Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,
For thou shalt see the vision when I go.'

"While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine
Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
One with him, to believe as he believed.
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

"There rose a hill that none but man could climb,
Scarred with a hundred wintry watercourses —
Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm
Round us and death; for every moment glanced
His silver arms and gloomed: so quick and thick
The lightnings here and there to left and right

481. Come, tense?

Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,
Sprang into fire: and at the base we found
On either hand, as far as eye could see,
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,
Part black, part whitened with the bones of men,
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king
Had built a way, where, linked with many a bridge,
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.
And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,
And every bridge as quickly as he crost
Sprang into fire and vanished, though I yearned
To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens
Opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed
Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first
At once I saw him far on the great Sea,
In silver-shining armor starry-clear;
And o'er his head the holy vessel hung
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,
If boat it were — I saw not whence it came.
And when the heavens opened and blazed again
Roaring, I saw him like a silver star —
And had he set the sail, or had the boat
Become a living creature clad with wings?
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.
Then in a moment when they blazed again
Opening, I saw the least of little stars
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star

I saw the spiritual city and all her spires
And gateways in a glory like one pearl —
No larger, though the goal of all the saints —
Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge
No memory in me lives; but that I touched
The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,
Glad that no phantom vexed me more, returned
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars."

"O brother," asked Ambrosius, — "for in sooth
These ancient books — and they would win thee — teem,
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,
With miracles and marvels like to these,
Not all unlike; which oftentime I read,
Who read but on my breviary with ease,
Till my head swims; and then go forth and pass
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
And almost plastered like a martin's nest
To these old walls — and mingle with our folk;
And knowing every honest face of theirs
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,
And every homely secret in their hearts,
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,
And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in,
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,

That have no meaning half a league away:
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs —
O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,
Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,
No man, no woman?"

Then Sir Percivale:

"All men, to one so bound by such a vow,
And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,
Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee
How far I faltered from my quest and vow?
For after I had lain so many nights,
A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake,
In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan
And meagre, and the vision had not come;
And then I chanced upon a goodly town
With one great dwelling in the middle of it;
Thither I made, and there was I disarmed
By maidens each as fair as any flower:
But when they led me into hall, behold,
The Princess of that castle was the one,
Brother, and that one only, who had ever
Made my heart leap; for when I moved of old
A slender page about her father's hall,
And she a slender maiden, all my heart
Went after her with longing: yet we twain
Had never kissed a kiss, or vowed a vow.
And now I came upon her once again,
And one had wedded her, and he was dead,

And all his land and wealth and state were hers.
And while I tarried, every day she set
A banquet richer than the day before
By me; for all her longing and her will
Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn,
I walking to and fro beside a stream
That flashed across her orchard underneath
Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,
And calling me the greatest of all knights,
Embraced me, and so kissed me the first time,
And gave herself and all her wealth to me.
Then I remembered Arthur's warning word,
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon,
The heads of all her people drew to me,
With supplication both of knees and tongue:
'We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight,
Our Lady says it, and we well believe:
Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,
And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.'
O me, my brother! but one night my vow
Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,
But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self,
And even the Holy Quest, and all but her;
Then after I was joined with Galahad
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth."

Then said the monk, "Poor men, when yule is cold,
Must be content to sit by little fires.

612. **yule**, the yule log, a large log forming the foundation of the fire.

And this am I, so that ye care for me
Ever so little; yea, and blest be Heaven
That brought thee here to this poor house of ours
Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm
My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity
To find thine own first love once more — to hold,
Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,
Or all but hold, and then — cast her aside,
Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.
For we that want the warmth of double life,
We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet
Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich, —
Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,
Seeing I never strayed beyond the cell,
But live like an old badger in his earth,
With earth about him everywhere, despite
All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,
None of your knights?"

"Yea so," said Percivale:
"One night my pathway swerving east, I saw
The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors
All in the middle of the rising moon:
And toward him spurred, and hailed him, and he me,
And each made joy of either; then he asked,
'Where is he? hast thou seen him — Lancelot? — Once,'
Said good Sir Bors, 'he dashed across me — mad,
And maddening what he rode: and when I cried,
"Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest
So holy," Lancelot shouted, "Stay me not!

I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,
For now there is a lion in the way."
So vanished.'

"Then Sir Bors had ridden on
Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,
Because his former madness, once the talk
And scandal of our table, had returned;
For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him
That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors
Beyond the rest: he well had been content
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,
The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,
Being so clouded with his grief and love,
Small heart was his after the Holy Quest:
If God would send the vision, well; if not,
The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.

"And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,
And found a people there among their crags,
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left
Paynim amid their circles, and the stones
They pitch up straight to heaven: and their wise men
Were strong in that old magic which can trace
The wandering of the stars, and scoffed at him
And this high Quest as at a simple thing:
Told him he followed — almost Arthur's words —

661. **Paynim**, probably the Druids. Stonehenge offers an instance of their strange religion. Originally it was a circle of thirty stones, fourteen feet high. Such circles were called "doom rings," and each contained an altar on which victims were offered in sacrifice.

A mocking fire: 'what other fire than he,
Whereby the blood beats and the blossom blows,
And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed?'
And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,
Hearing he had a difference with their priests,
Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell
Of great piled stones; and lying bounden there
In darkness through innumerable hours
He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep
Over him, till by miracle — what else? —
Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,
Such as no wind could move: and through the gap
Glimmered the streaming scud: then came a night
Still as the day was loud; and through the gap
The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round —
For, brother, so one night, because they roll
Through such a round in heaven, we named the stars,
Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King —
And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,
In on him shone: 'And then to me, to me,'
Said good Sir Bors, 'beyond all hopes of mine,
Who scarce had prayed or asked it for myself —
Across the seven clear stars — O grace to me —
In color like the fingers of a hand
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
Glided and past, and close upon it pealed
A sharp quick thunder.' Afterwards, a maid,
Who kept our holy faith among her kin
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go."

To whom the monk: "And I remember now
That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was

Who spake so low and sadly at our board;
And mighty reverent at our grace was he:
A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,
Smiled with his lips — a smile beneath a cloud,
But heaven had meant it for a sunny one:
Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reached
The city, found ye all your knights returned,
Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,
Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?"

Then answered Percivale: "And that can I,
Brother, and truly; since the living words
Of so great men as Lancelot and our King
Pass not from door to door and out again,
But sit within the house. O, when we reached
The city, our horses stumbling as they trode
On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices,
And shattered talbots, which had left the stones
Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.

"And there sat Arthur on the daïs-throne,
And those that had gone out upon the Quest,
Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,
And those that had not, stood before the King,
Who, when he saw me, rose and bade me hail,
Saying, 'A welfare in thine eye reproves
Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee
On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford.
So fierce a gale made havoc here of late

709. sooth, truth.

Among the strange devices of our kings;
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,
And from the statue Merlin moulded for us
Half-wrenched a golden wing; but now — the Quest,
This vision — hast thou seen the Holy Cup,
That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?'

"So when I told him all thyself hast heard,
Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve
To pass away into the quiet life,
He answered not, but, sharply turning, asked
Of Gawain, 'Gawain, was this Quest for thee?'

"'Nay, lord,' said Gawain, 'not for such as I.
Therefore I communed with a saintly man,
Who made me sure the Quest was not for me;
For I was much awearied of the Quest:
But found a silk pavilion in a field,
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,
And blew my merry maidens all about
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me.'

"He ceased; and Arthur turned to whom at first
He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, pushed
Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,
Held it, and there, half-hidden by him stood,
Until the King espied him, saying to him,
'Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true
Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;' and Bors,
'Ask me not, for I may not speak of it,
I saw it:' and the tears were in his eyes.

"Then there remained but Lancelot, for the rest
Spake but of sundry perils in the storm;
Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,
Our Arthur kept his best until the last;
'Thou, too, my Lancelot, asked the King, 'my friend,
Our mightiest, hath this Quest availed for thee?'

"'Our mightiest!' answered Lancelot, with a groan;
'O King!'—and when he paused, methought I spied
A dying fire of madness in his eyes—
'O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,
Happier are those that welter in their sin,
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,
Slime of the ditch: but in me lived a sin
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
And poisonous grew together, each as each,
Not to be plucked asunder; and when thy knights
Sware, I sware with them only in the hope
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
They might be plucked asunder. Then I spake
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,
That save they could be plucked asunder, all
My quest were but in vain; to whom I vowed
That I would work according as he willed.
And forth I went, and while I yearned and strove
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,
My madness came upon me as of old,
And whipt me into waste fields far away;

760. **kept his best until the last.** See *John* ii. 1–11.

There was I beaten down by little men,
Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword
And shadow of my spear had been enow
To scare them from me once; and then I came
All in my folly to the naked shore,
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
Though heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.
And blackening in the sea-foam swayed a boat,
Half-swallowed in it, anchored with a chain;
And in my madness to myself I said,
"I will embark and I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin."
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.
Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,
And with me drove the moon and all the stars;
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,
Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,
A castle like a rock upon a rock,
With chasm like portals open to the sea,
And steps that met the breaker! there was none
Stood near it but a lion on each side
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes

Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between;
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice
"Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts
Will tear thee piecemeal." Then with violence
The sword was dashed from out my hand, and fell.
And up into the sounding hall I past;
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,
No bench nor table, painting on the wall
Or shield of night; only the rounded moon
Through the tall oriel on the rolling sea.
But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward: up I climbed a thousand steps
With pain: as in a dream I seemed to climb
Forever: at the last I reached a door,
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
"Glory and joy and honor to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail."
Then in my madness I essayed the door;
It gave; and through a stormy glare, a heat
As from a seven-times heated furnace, I,
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
With such a fierceness that I swooned away —
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All palled in crimson samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.
And but for all my madness and my sin,
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw

828. tall oriel. Meaning?

That which I saw; but what I saw was veiled
And covered; and this Quest was not for me.'

"So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left
The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain — nay,
Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words, —
A reckless and irreverent knight was he,
Now boldened by the silence of his King, —
Well, I will tell thee: 'O King, my liege,' he said,
'Hath Gawain failed in any quest of thine?
When have I stinted stroke in foughten field?
But as for thine, my good friend Percivale,
Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least.
But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
Henceforward.'

"'Deafer,' said the blameless King,
'Gawain, and blinder unto holy things
Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,
Being too blind to have desire to see.
But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,
Blessed are Bors, Lancelot, and Percivale,
For these have seen according to their sight.
For every fiery prophet in old times,
And all the sacred madness of the bard,
When God made music through them, could but speak
His music by the framework and the chord;
And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

"'Nay — but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet
Could all of true and noble in knight and man
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,
With such a closeness, but apart there grew,
Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,
Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;
Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.

"'And spake I not too truly, O my knights?
Was I too dark a prophet when I said
To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
That most of them would follow wandering fires,
Lost in the quagmire? — lost to me and gone,
And left me gazing at a barren board,
And a lean Order — scarce returned a tithe —
And out of those to whom the vision came
My greatest hardly will believe he saw;
Another hath beheld it afar off,
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
Cares but to pass into the silent life.
And one hath had the vision face to face,
And now his chair desires him here in vain,
However they may crown him otherwhere.

"'And some among you held, that if the King
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow;
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is as but the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plough.
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done; but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day

Come, as they will; and many a time they come
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air
But vision — yea, his very hand and foot —
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.'

"So spake the King: I knew not all he meant."

GUINEVERE

"His [Tennyson's] greatest achievement still is that noblest of modern episodes, the canto entitled 'Guinevere' surcharged with tragic pathos and high dramatic power. He never has so reached the *passio vera* of the early dramatists as in this imposing scene. There is nothing finer in modern verse than the interview between Arthur and his remorseful wife; nothing loftier than the passage beginning:

'Lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God forgives.'"

—STEDMAN'S *Victorian Poets.*

QUEEN GUINEVERE had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burn'd
Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast

2. **Almesbury**, Amesbury, in Wiltshire, said to be so named after the old monastery of King Ambrosius, the scene of this idyll.

4. **novice**, a nun who has not taken the final vows.

7. **face-cloth**, the white cloth with which the faces of the dead were covered.

10. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 315–324; *Gareth and Lynette*, 25–32.

Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this
He chill'd the popular praises of the King
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;
And tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse,
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought
To make disruption in the Table Round
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims
Were sharpen'd by strong hate for Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that mock'd the may,
Had been — their wont — a-maying and return'd,
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,
Climb'd to the high top of the garden-wall
To spy some secret scandal if he might,
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst; and more than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by
Spied where he couch'd, and as the gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
So from the high wall and the flowering grove
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the way;
But when he knew the prince tho' marr'd with dust,
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,

16. **Hengist**, one of the Saxon chieftains who invaded Britain.
32. **colewort**, a kind of cabbage.
37. **king's blood**. Cf. Notes to *Gareth and Lynette*, lines 1 and 26.

Made such excuses as he might, and these
Full knightly without scorn: for in those days
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;
But, if a man were halt, or hunch'd, in him
By those whom God had made full-limb'd and tall,
Scorn was allow'd as part of his defect,
And he was answer'd softly by the King
And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot holp
To raise the prince, who rising twice or thrice
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:
But, ever after, the small violence done
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told
This matter to the Queen, at first she laugh'd
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,
Then shudder'd, as the village wife who cries,
"I shudder, some one steps across my grave;"
Then laugh'd again, but faintlier, for indeed
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye.
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,

45. holp, helped; an obsolete form.
47. smote his knees, to shake off the dust.

And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear —
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls —
Held her awake: or if she slept she dream'd
An awful dream; for then she seem'd to stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it till it touch'd her, and she turn'd —
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew,
Till even the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane; and at last she said,
"O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,
And if we meet again some evil chance
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze
Before the people and our lord the King."
And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,
And still they met and met. Again she said,

70. Scansion?
73. rust of murder, blood stains.
86. bane, poison; ruin.

"O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence."
And then they were agreed upon a night —
When the good King should not be there — to meet
And part for ever. Vivien, lurking, heard.
She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale they met
And greeted. Hands in hands, and eye to eye,
Low on the border of her couch they sat
Stammering and staring. It was their last hour,
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought
His creatures to the basement of the tower
For testimony; and crying with full voice,
"Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last," aroused
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike
Leapt on him, and hurl'd him headlong, and he fell
Stunn'd, and his creatures took and bare him off,
And all was still. Then she, "The end is come,
And I am shamed for ever;" and he said:
"Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise,
And fly to my strong castle over-seas:
There will I hide thee till my life shall end,
There hold thee with my life against the world."
She answer'd: "Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou
Unwedded; yet rise now, and let us fly,
For I will draw me into sanctuary,
And bide my doom." So Lancelot got her horse,
Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,

120. sanctuary, a sacred place, hence, a place of refuge.

And then they rode to the divided way,
There kiss'd, and parted weeping: for he past,
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,
Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:
And in herself she moan'd, "Too late, too late!"
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,
A blot in heaven, the raven, flying high,
Croak'd, and she thought, "He spies a field of death;
For now the heathen of the Northern Sea,
Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,
Begin to slay the folk and spoil the land."

And when she came to Almesbury she spake
There to the nuns, and said, "Mine enemies
Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,
Receive and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
Her name to whom ye yield it till her time
To tell you;" and her beauty, grace, and power
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns,
Nor with them mix'd, nor told her name, nor sought,

127. **weald, or wold,** a wooded place.

132. **raven,** a bird of ill omen, and here the symbol of the Vikings, the "heathen of the Northern Sea."

Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,
But communed only with the little maid,
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness
Which often lured her from herself; but now,
This night, a rumor wildly blown about
Came that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,
"With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me," and bow'd down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brook'd
No silence, brake it, uttering "Late! so late!
What hour, I wonder now?" and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her: "Late, so late!"
Which when she heard, the Queen look'd up, and said,
"O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep."
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

"Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"No light had we: for that we do repent,
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

147. **housel**, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; the Eucharist. **shrift**, absolution following confession.
148. **little maid**, the novice referred to in line 4.
151–3. Cf. lines 10–12.
157. **brook'd**, permitted.
166–177. Cf *Matthew* xxv. 1–13.

"No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O, let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O, let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."

So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her:

"O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words — the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,
And if I do not there is penance given —
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done: right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor — Ah, sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours!
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great;

180. Her thought. Cf. line 130.

For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done:
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good.
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That, howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud;
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a King it could not be."

Then to her own sad heart mutter'd the Queen,
"Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?"
But openly she answer'd, "Must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?"

"Yea," said the maid, "this is all woman's grief,
That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen."

Then thought the Queen within herself again,
"Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?"
But openly she spake and said to her,
"O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,

What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?"

To whom the little novice garrulously:
"Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.
So said my father, and himself was knight
Of the great Table — at the founding of it,
And rode thereto from Lyonnesse; and he said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused, and turning — there,
All down the lonely coast of Lyonnesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them — headland after headland flame
Far on into the rich heart of the west:
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
And sent a deep sea-voice thro' all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.
So said my father — yea, and furthermore,
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,
That shook beneath them as the thistle shakes
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed:
And still at evenings on before his horse

234. **Lyonnesse**, the old name for a continuation of Cornwall, in the southwestern part of England.

The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd and broke
Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd and broke
Flying, for all the land was full of life.
And when at last he came to Camelot,
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;
And in the hall itself was such a feast
As never man had dream'd; for every knight
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served
By hands unseen; and even as he said
Down in the cellars merry bloated things
Shoulder'd the spigot, straddling on the butts
While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men
Before the coming of the sinful Queen."

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,
"Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs
And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?"

To whom the novice garrulously again:
"Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,
Even in the presence of an enemy's fleet,
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;
And many a mystic lay of life and death
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,
When round him bent the spirits of the hills
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame.
So said my father — and that night the bard

266. **butts**, casks holding 126 gallons.

Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
As wellnigh more than man, and rail'd at those
Who call'd him the false son of Gorloïs:
For there was no man knew from whence he came;
But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea,
And that was Arthur; and they foster'd him
Till he by miracle was approven King:
And that his grave should be a mystery
From all men, like his birth; and could he find
A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He falter'd, and his hand fell from the harp,
And pale he turn'd, and reel'd, and would have fallen,
But that they stay'd him up; nor would he tell
His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?"

Then thought the Queen, "Lo! they have set her on,
Our simple-seeming abbess and her nuns,
To play upon me," and bow'd her head nor spake.

286. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 184–236.

289. **Bude and Bos**, points on the coast of Cornwall.

292. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 365–393.

294. **miracle.** Malory tells us that Arthur proved his right to the throne by drawing a sword out of a stone, a feat of which no other knight was capable.

299. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 89–93.

Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue
Full often, "and, sweet lady, if I seem
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales
Which my good father told me, check me too
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one
Of noblest manners, tho' himself would say
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
Kill'd in a tilt, come next, five summers back,
And left me; but of others who remain,
And of the two first-famed for courtesy —
And pray you check me if I ask amiss —
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?"

Then the pale Queen look'd up and answer'd her:
"Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and the King
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and these two
Were the most nobly-manner'd men of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind."

319. **come next, five summers back,** five years ago next summer.

323. **which had noblest.** *Sc.* courtesy, manners.

329. **Forbore his own advantage.** Cf. *Lancelot and Elaine*, 1345–1353.

"Yea," said the maid, "be manners such fair fruit?
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold
Less noble, being, as all rumor runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the world."

To which a mournful answer made the Queen:
"O, closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world and all its lights
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,
And weep for her who drew him to his doom."

"Yea," said the little novice, "I pray for both;
But I should all as soon believe that his,
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen."

So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would heal;
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried:
"Such as thou art be never maiden more
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague
And play upon and harry me, petty spy
And traitress!" When that storm of anger brake
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen

As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,
And when the Queen had added, "Get thee hence!"
Fled frighted. Then that other left alone
Sigh'd, and began to gather heart again,
Saying in herself: "The simple, fearful child
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, Heaven, for surely I repent!
For what is true repentance but in thought —
Not even in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us?
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more."

And even in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to yield her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure, — for the time
Was may-time, and as yet no sin was dream'd, —
Rode under groves that look'd a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreaking thro' the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale

378. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 446–451.

The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By couriers gone before; and on again,
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,
And moving thro' the past unconsciously,
Came to that point where first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
"Not like my Lancelot" — while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper thro' the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, "The King!" She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Thro' the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovell'd with her face against the floor.
There with her milk-white arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King,
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,

395. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 13–19. Uther had two golden dragons made, one of which he carried to the wars with him, whence he was called Uther Pendragon.

402. **thought him cold.** Cf. *Lancelot and Elaine*, 121–123, 131–135.

Monotonous and hollow like a ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but, tho' changed, the King's:

"Liest thou here so low, the child of one
I honor'd, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come — from him,
From waging bitter war with him; and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.

419. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 1.

424. The craft of kindred. The reference is to Modred.

429. For the "twelve great battles," cf. *Lancelot and Elaine*, 284–305.

439. troth and fealty, loyalty and allegiance.

And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live.
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harm'd.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd.
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways
Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,

450. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 92–93.

To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve before I wedded thee,
Believing, 'Lo, mine helpmate, one to feel
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy!'
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us who might be left could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?

487. ensample, example.
499. nor seem, without seeming.

And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, tho' thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house:
For being thro' his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people and their bane!"

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the war-horse neigh'd
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again:

500. bowers, bedrooms.
503. vacant, empty, abandoned.

"Yet think not that I came to urge thy crimes;
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death, —
When first I learnt thee hidden here, — is past.
The pang — which, while I weigh'd thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn — is also past — in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinn'd, and I,
Lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives! do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee —
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's; nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries,
'I loathe thee:' yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee,
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life
So far that my doom is, I love thee still.

537. one, his own.

Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband — not a small soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Thro' the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son — no kin of mine, who leagues
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,
Traitors — and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side, see thee no more —
Farewell!"

And while she grovell'd at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found

559. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 509.
570. **My sister's son.** Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 316–324.

The casement: "peradventure," so she thought,
"If I might see his face, and not be seen,"
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!
And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
And even then he turn'd; and more and more
The moony vapor rolling round the King,
Who seem'd the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretch'd out her arms and cried aloud,
"O Arthur!" there her voice brake suddenly,
Then — as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale —
Went on in passionate utterance:

"Gone — my lord!
Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.
Farewell? I should have answer'd his farewell.
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,

My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,
Call'd me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
Let the world be; that is but of the world —
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mock'd me when he spake of hope;
His hope he call'd it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God! Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights —
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,

633. "Is Guinevere to be separated from Arthur forever? — that is the question whose answer hangs upon the close of this struggle. And the queen herself tells us the result, when she says: '— Myself must tell him in that purer life, but now it were too daring.'" — DR. VAN DYKE.

Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb —
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air,
That pure severity of perfect light —
I yearn'd for warmth and color which I found
In Lancelot — now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none
Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?
Now — ere he goes to the great battle? none:
Myself must tell him in that purer life,
But now it were too daring. Ah, my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest;
It surely was my profit had I known;
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Nor Lancelot, nor another."

Here her hand
Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes: she look'd and saw
The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,
"Yea, little maid, for am *I* not forgiven?"
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns
All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed
Within her, and she wept with these and said:

"Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.

657. **vail (not *veil*)**, cast down, from the French *s'avaler*, to hang down.

O, shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,
Meek maidens, from the voices crying, 'Shame!'
I must not scorn myself; he loves me still.
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;
Pray and be pray'd for; lie before your shrines;
Do each low office of your holy house;
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes
Who ransom'd us, and haler too than I;
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;
And so wear out in alms-deed and in prayer
The sombre close of that voluptuous day
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King."

She said: they took her to themselves; and she
Still hoping, fearing "is it yet too late?"
Dwelt with them, till in time their abbess died.
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen abbess, there, an abbess, lived
For three brief years, and there, an abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

677. dole, alms.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

1. The incidents in Arthur's career that immediately preceded his death are briefly these: The Queen, Guinevere, had left the King's court, and fled to hiding at the nunnery of Amesbury, owing to the discovery by the treacherous Modred, the King's nephew, of her love for Lancelot. King Arthur had gone to attack Lancelot in the north; during his absence Modred had raised a revolt, and had had himself crowned king. The King marched south, and pursued Modred to the west coast. On his way he stopped at Amesbury, and had the farewell interview with the repentant Queen so beautifully described in the Idyll of *Guinevere*. The King then marches westward in pursuit of Modred.

2. **First made and latest left.** Cf. *The Coming of Arthur:*

> "Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
> Knighted by Arthur at his crowning."

3. **when the man . . . voice,** when extreme old age had left Bedivere only strength enough to tell the tale of his past life. Cf. the Latin *vox et praeterea nihil.*

7. **Who slowly . . . King.** Bedivere, passing in the quiet night through the slumbering camp, overheard Arthur in his tent mourning over the failure of his purposes.

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—

9. **I found Him . . . find Him not.** Arthur cannot understand why the glory and power of God should be so clearly manifested in the works of nature, in the visible beauty of heaven and earth, while His dealings with mankind seem full of mystery and contradiction. Arthur had fought in God's cause and founded the Round Table for "love of God and men": was he now to die amid the ruins of his life's work?

13. **for why.** The expression *for why*, used, as here, as an equivalent to the interrogative *wherefore*, is met with in old ballad poetry and in modern imitations of it, as in Cowper's *John Gilpin*, ii. 211, 212:

> "He lost them sooner than at first;
> For why? — they were too big."

In *Harper's Magazine* for December 1883, Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie writes, "The first *Idyll* and the last, I have heard Mr. Tennyson say, are intentionally more archaic than the others." This archaism is noticeable in the studied severity and simplicity of the diction generally as well as in the use of such old forms or words as *stricken*, *upheaven*, *lightly*, *hest*, *lief;* in the repetition of "permanent epithets," whether composed of single words as in "bold Sir Bedivere," or of whole lines, as "Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful;" also in the formal introduction to each speech, as

> "Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,"
> "To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere."

For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die."

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear

24. **And all . . . peace** alludes specially to the treachery of Guinevere and Lancelot.

28. **I pass . . . not die.** Even in the extremity of his despair Arthur has faith in the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding his mysterious doom made by Merlin, "the wise man"; see *The Coming of Arthur*, p. 43, l. 418:

> "And Merlin in our time
> Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
> Though men may wound him that he will not die,
> But pass, again to come."

29. **weird battle.** See the description of the battle, below, ll. 95–135.

30. **Gawain** was brother of Modred and Gareth, and nephew of King Arthur, being son of his sister, "Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent."

30. **killed In Lancelot's war.** Malory, *Morte Darthur*, xxi. 2, thus describes Gawain's death: "And then was the noble knight sir Gawaine found in a great boate lying more than halfe dead. . . . 'My uncle King Arthur,' said sir Gawaine, 'wit ye well that my deathes day is come and all is through mine owne hastinesse and wilfulnesse, for I am smitten upon the old wound that sir Launcelot du Lake gave me, of the which I feele that I must die.' And so at the houre of noone sir Gawaine betooke his soule into the hands of our Lord God."

31. **blown . . . wandering wind.** In Dante's *Inferno* the punishment of "carnal sinners" is thus described:

Went shrilling, "Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight."
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sacked by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called,
"Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries

> "The stormy blast of hell
> With restless fury drives the spirits on,
> Whirled round and dashed amain with sore annoy.
> When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,
> There shrieks are heard, there lamentations, moans,
> And blasphemies 'gainst the good Power in heaven." — *Cary.*

35. **an isle of rest,** "the island-valley of Avilion" of l. 427. So in Homer, *Od.* xi., the shade of Tiresias foretells to Odysseus:

> "So peaceful shalt thou end thy blissful days
> And steal thyself from life by slow decays." — *Pope.*

39. **wail their way.** Cf. *The Inferno* of Dante, quoted above:

> "As cranes,
> Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
> Stretched out in long array, so I beheld
> Spirits; who came loud wailing, hurried on
> By their dire doom." — *Cary.*

41. **Shrilled; but . . . cries.** Notice the effect of the unusual break, denoted by the semicolon, after the first half-foot; the reader is brought to a sudden pause, as if to listen to the shrill wail of the flying spirit.

Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?"

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
"O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,

49. **go along with me,** be involved in my ruin.

51. **let pass . . . field.** Bedivere's unimaginative and practical nature has no care for anything which he cannot see and touch and account for; all else he regards as of no significance, or, at most, as harmless.

53. **thy name . . . cloud.** Cf. *The Last Tournament:*

> "the knights,
> Glorying in each new glory, set his name
> High on all hills and in the signs of heaven;"

and *To the Queen,* at the end of the *Idylls:*

> "that gray king, whose name, a ghost
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still."

"Arthur's Seat" is the name given to the lofty hill near Edinburgh, and to other "high places" in various parts of Great Britain; certain cromlechs in Glamorgan and in Herefordshire are known as "Arthur's Stones."

59. **Modred.** In *Guinevere* Arthur calls him

> "the man they call
> My sister's son — no kin of mine, who leagues
> With Lords of the White Horse, heathen and knights,
> Traitors —"

and again, in ll. 155–156, disclaims kinship with him. Modred's character is painted throughout the *Idylls* in the darkest

And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

colors. Even in boyhood his mean and treacherous nature is hinted at in contrast with the frankness of the young Gawain; see *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 322–323:

> "But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
> And there half-heard."

77. **One lying . . . Almesbury.** See *Guinevere:*

> "prone from off her seat she fell
> And groveled with her face against the floor."

Ambrose-bury, Ambresbury, Almesbury, or Amesbury, in Wiltshire, seven and a half miles from Salisbury, possessed an ancient abbey of Benedictine nuns, to which, as the old chronicles relate, Guinevere had fled after her fall.

78. **Hath folded . . . world.** Has covered my path in life with darkness and confusion.

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse —
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.

81. **Lyonnesse.** A fabulous country, an extension of Cornwall to the south and west, said to be now covered by the sea. There is still extant near Land's End a tradition that the Scilly Isles were once part of the mainland; similarly, in parts of Ireland the belief exists that a large portion of the island was swallowed up by the sea and occasionally comes to the surface. The name is sometimes written Leonnoys.

87. **phantom circle** alludes to the distant sea-horizon, vague and ill defined; it is called "sea-circle" in *Enoch Arden*; cf. *Ulysses*, 19, 20:

"Whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move."

93. **Nor ever yet . . . west.** Malory's account is as follows: "And never was there seene a more dolefuller battaile in no Christian land, for there was but rashing and riding, foyning and stricking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke. . . . And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold ground: and ever they fought till it was nigh night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the doune."

A death-white mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on shattered helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs

95. **A death-white mist.** Contrast with the description of "this last, dim, weird battle" the brilliant picture of Arthur's first battle in *The Coming of Arthur:*

> "When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
> With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world
> Was all so clear about him, that he saw
> The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
> And even in high day the morning star."

These are only two out of numerous occasions that may be found in the *Idylls* when the sympathy of external nature with the actions and emotions of man is vividly pictured.

In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one death-bed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or through death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the north, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

"Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,

135. **The voice . . . to be.** The ocean has frequently been used in literature as a symbol of Time and Eternity. Cf. Shaks.:

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore
So do our minutes hasten to their end;"

and Byron's "Address to the Ocean," *Childe Harold*, iv.:

"The image of Eternity."

And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as though they had not died for me? —
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead."

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: "My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house."

Then spake the King: "My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath failed,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of knighthood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege

148. **King everywhere . . . house.** Bedivere's simple loyalty is no prey to doubt; his practical temper finds no room for discussion while work remains to be done, but insists on prompt action with what powers are still available.

Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights

170. **So all day long.** The original fragment *Morte d'Arthur* began at this point. The lines "So all day long . . . King Arthur," which introduced the shorter poem, are here retained, to serve, perhaps, as a sort of recapitulation of the lines now prefixed, that the reader's attention may be concentrated on the last scene which follows.

177. **chancel.** The eastern and most sacred portion of a church, formerly always separated from the main part of the building by a screen of lattice-work (Lat. *cancelli*, cross-bars).

180. **a great water.** Since the poet wishes to represent the general impression produced by the view from the chapel, he avoids all detail, and uses the vague words "a water" instead of "a lake." The beholder would not at first sight notice whether it was a lake or a broad river; all he would be conscious of would be a spreading sheet of water of size and shape unknown; and the picture is presented to the reader just as it would first strike the eye of Sir Bedivere.

Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, —
Though Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten through the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I rowed across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,

191. **Merlin.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, note 420. The Idyll of *Merlin and Vivien* gives an account of Merlin's fate. See also Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*.

205. **fling him.** Arthur regards the magic sword as a person endowed with life and power of its own. **mere,** lake or pool; the word originally meant "that which is dead," hence a desert, waste, or stagnant pool; cf. Lat. *mare* and Skt. *maru*, a desert, from *mri*, to die; also French *mare* and English *marsh*.

Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm —
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seemed
Better to leave Excalibur concealed
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

215. **mighty bones.** The bones of the Danish invaders heaped up in part of the church building at Hythe are abnormally large-sized, and seem to show that "there were giants in those days." As noted above, there are still extant traces of ancient tombs at Barham-down.

231. **water-flags**, aquatic plants of the genus *Iris*.

232. **So strode he back slow.** These words are all accented,

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Hast thou performed my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
"Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseemed
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had followed, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

and the line thus becomes heavy and slow to pronounce; the rhythm thus echoes the heavy slow steps of Sir Bedivere.

238. **washing in the reeds . . . lapping on the crag.** It has been remarked that these two phrases mark exactly "the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier." The water would splash softly through the reeds, but would make a sharper sound when striking against the impenetrable rock.

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a King demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
"What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the water lapping on the crag
And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
"Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widowed of the power in his eye
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword,
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm

308. **moving isles of winter**, floating icebergs. Observe how the poet in three lines presents a complete picture of one of nature's grandest phenomena, thus introducing a most vivid simile without interrupting the flow of the narrative. Notice the compression of style.

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not though I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I looked again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere

338. **As in a picture**, as the eyes of a painted portrait often have a fixed and expectant gaze.

Remorsefully regarded through his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him through the place of tombs.

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

345. **nightmare**, a fiend or witch supposed to cause evil dreams. Skelton has "Medusa, that mare" (i.e., that hag).

350. **Clothed with his breath**, enveloped as by a cloak in a mist caused by his own damp breath clinging round him in the frosty air.

351. **Larger than human.** Cf. the Idyll of *Guinevere:*

> "The moony vapor rolling round the King,
> Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
> Enwound him fold by fold."

354. **harness.** Originally, as here, body armor.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these
Three queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,
And called him by his name, complaining loud,

365. **Black-stoled.** The *stole* was a long loose robe reaching to the feet. Cf. *Sir Galahad*, "In stoles of white." With this, description contrast that of the ship in *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 374–375:

"and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks."

366. **Three queens.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 275–278:

"three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need."

Malory says, "One was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was the Queen of Northgales; the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands."

And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the withered moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuishes dashed with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls —
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne — were parched with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shattered column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led

383. **greaves**, armor for the lower part of the legs: derivation uncertain. **cuishes**, armor for the thighs; Lat. *coxa*, thigh. **dashed with drops Of onset**, splashed with drops of blood from the encounter. Cf. *The Princess:*

> "Though dashed with death,
> He reddens what he kisses."

400. **the light . . . myrrh.** Arthur is compared with the star in the East which appeared at Christ's birth to the Magi, or Wise Men, and led them to Bethlehem, where they presented to the new-born Child offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. See Bible, *Matthew* ii. 11.

The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer

403. **image of the mighty world.** "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table, they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world." — *Malory*. The belief that the world was in form round and flat, like the top of a round table, prevailed even after the globe had been circumnavigated. See *Columbus:*

"for at last their Highnesses
Were half-assured this earth might be a sphere."

Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst — if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groaned, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag:
Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,

"He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but — if he come no more —
O me, be yon dark queens in yon black boat,
Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

468. **And the new . . . new year.** The cycle of the mystic years is now complete from Arthur's birth —

> "that same night, the night of the new year,
> Was Arthur born —

to his passing away before the dawn of another new year, and from this point

> "The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

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